

Lost in Transition: The Effect of Split Student Teaching Experience  
on Beginning Early Childhood Teachers' Practices

by

Meral Besken Ergisi

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Beth Blue Swadener, Chair  
Billie Enz  
Darlene Pany

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## ABSTRACT

Arizona State University's (ASU) teacher education program has been restructured several times in the last two decades to train teachers to teach children more effectively by responding to their individual needs and learning demands. One of the reasons for restructuring was to respond to new licensing requirements by the State. To serve young children's needs, the state of Arizona required individuals working with young children to obtain either early childhood licensing or endorsement by January, 2009. Responding to these new requirements, ASU now requires student teaching in a preschool setting in addition to the existing Kindergarten to third grade student teaching and internship requirements. This study addressed the question of teacher preparation and self-efficacy based on this newly restructured teaching model used in the ASU Tempe teacher education program. The following questions guided this study:

- 1) What effects do beginning teachers perceive that their split-student teaching experiences have on their experience as a new teacher; 2) How do beginning teachers' prior schooling, educational, and personal background influence their current teaching; and 3) What role does home, family, and collegial support play as beginning teachers start their teaching career?

A qualitative case study research method was utilized in this study. Two face-to-face, in-depth individual interviews and one focus group interview with three second-year and two third-year beginning teachers were utilized to understand their experiences in the program and in their beginning years of teaching. An analysis of interview data revealed beginning teachers' student teaching experiences partially fulfilled their need of having adequate in-classroom experience before starting their teaching careers; yet they highlighted some suggestions for student teaching assignments to better prepare prospective teacher candidates in the program. Moreover, they expressed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction toward courses taken in the program. Their statements also emphasized the importance of having effective mentorship in their student teaching and first year of teaching. Support from administration, experienced colleagues, friends, and family members were also acknowledged as highly valuable as they struggled with issues in their beginning career.

I dedicate this work to my best friend and husband of over 10 years,  
Zeynel, for his love, encouragement and support. I also dedicate to my  
daughter, Mayre, whose existence and personality motivated me  
whenever I needed it.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

Teacher education programs' assumed mission is to train and prepare teachers before they enter the profession. The responsibility of those administering the programs is to provide the required knowledge and skills to those who want to be teachers. Hence, in theory, new teachers will enter the profession able to teach with a high degree of competence and knowledge. However, this picture is idealized and the research regarding the reality of the lives of beginning teachers does not reflect this notion. For example, first time teachers have to deal with various difficulties: 1) "they have to prove themselves to school professionals, administration, parents, children, and themselves" (Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin, 1999, p.2), "to learn classroom management" (Bullough & Baughman, 1997, p. 3), "to shape their identity" (Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin, 1999, p. 4), and finally to cope with all the problems they face the first time.

The question of how well education programs prepare novice teachers is not new. Yet most teacher preparation programs have not looked deeply at the outcomes of their programs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005a). Becoming a teacher does not occur in just four years of college. Instead research suggests it is rather a long process

(Christensen & Fessler, 1992). Carter and Doyle (1996) state that “...it takes, on average, from 4 to 7 years for teachers to achieve a sense of identity with teaching, gain a feeling of confidence and stabilization, and reach a balance between teaching demands and other interests.” Sadly, research suggests that teachers will leave the profession before they become proficient, as current statistics suggest that 33% will leave the occupation in first three years of their career long before they can form teacher identity (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003; Simmons et al. 1999).

While most states have licensing requirements that include testing pedagogical, basic skills and content area knowledge, little is done to assure that new teachers can actually competently implement classroom instruction. Two decades ago, Bullough (1989) published outcomes of his study done with a first-year teacher. For this study, he collected the data starting from the participant’s coursework and student teaching as a college student, later followed her throughout her first two years of teaching. Bullough, by doing extensive observations and interviews, through this case study, provided the reader with detailed analysis of the process of first and second year teachers’ practices, the challenges they face, and its relation to their student teaching experience in the program. From his research

Bullough states that beginning teachers usually are not satisfied with their preparation in the university. He suggests the main reason for this dissatisfaction is the perception that the experiences pre-service teachers encountered at the university did not relate to their real-life teaching. Before entering the profession, teacher candidates fantasize themselves as a teacher who can easily overcome the challenges in their first year. Their experiences during student teaching do not help them to see the realities in the 'real teaching', and that they might be overwhelmed and challenged in their own classroom.

After 20 years, is this critique still relevant? Does student teaching now present a more realistic view to teacher candidates to prevent 'transition shock' causing beginning teachers to be unable to function as a teacher (Corcoran, 1981) in their first teaching job? Do today's teacher education program graduates start with more realistic ideas than graduates of twenty years ago?

### **Understanding the Role of Student Teaching in Professional Programs**

Perhaps one of the least studied aspects of teacher preparation is the student teaching experience. How well does this internship prepare teacher candidates before they enter the profession? McLean (1999) underlines the role and importance of student teaching to

beginning teachers' initial experiences in the field. She maintains that in the past, traditional models of teacher education did not place a great deal of emphasis on student teaching—in fact this period had been called the “black-box” of teacher education (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). In contrast, contemporary teacher education programs now stress field experience and require their students to participate in an extensive field experience throughout their program. Yet, the amount and the timeline for field experience vary greatly among programs. Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005) elucidate the variety of pre-service teaching options and maintain that both the amount and timing of student teaching experiences effect beginning teachers' practice. But once again, there is little empirical data that could, with certainty, declare the best context for these internships or specify the optimal amount of time to help a prospective new teacher become more proficient at the outset of their career. By examining various designs of teacher education programs and related researches, Darling-Hammond et al. draw an interesting conclusion about how teacher education programs are designed which appears to be based less on research than a combination of context, pragmatics and philosophies.

Very different practices arise out of different conceptions and traditions, which frequently are unexamined. Programs have



different ideas about what clinical experiences ought to accomplish, when and where they should occur and over what period of time, whether and how they should relate to coursework, and how many different settings a given student teacher should experience. (pp. 409-410)

New teachers' experiences and the knowledge they gained before they enter the profession are significantly effectual. Beginning teachers bring three set of experiences to their new place of employment: 1) experiences that exercised similar or related pedagogical skills; 2) experiences as a pupil and 3) university coursework (Schempp et al. 1999). Teaching experience gained before entering the profession contributes a great deal in beginning teachers' ability to survive and thrive in the school. In fact, in-service teachers universally refer to their student teaching as the most valuable experience among other experiences in their education in the university. Likewise, as in-service teachers reflected on their professional coursework, they also identified experiences obtained in classrooms as a part of their method practicum as highly valued (Schempp, et al. 1999).

Self-efficacy – “people’s judgments of their capabilities to work as a successful teacher” (Hong, 2010, p. 1536) – is also notable in experiences of student teachers and beginning teachers. Teachers’ low-self efficacy related to classroom management was found to be resulted in negative emotions (fear, stress, burnout, etc.) in beginning teachers

(Hong, 2010). On the other hand, student-teacher efficacy was also found to be correlated positively to high-guidance interaction with their mentor teacher. This high-level of efficacy is transferred to their first year of teaching (Fives, Hamman, and Olivarez, 2007).

Henke, Chen, and Geis (2000) interviews of 11,192 third-year teachers found that student teaching also creates a positive attitude among individuals who are already in the profession. These interviews revealed that teachers who had student teaching experiences would more likely choose a teaching career again, if they were given a choice. They also found that although student teaching was an important aspect of the early teaching experience, there are several other factors that also help beginning teachers in their transition from being a student to being a teacher. This research found that teachers valued support from school administration, district, mentor, family members and an individual's own school experiences.

Having done a study with five pre-service teachers during their Kindergarten student teaching, Burke (2004) did a follow-up study with two of these student teachers during their first year of teaching to understand their experience as first year teachers. The first participant, a single mother, was an outstanding student teacher. However, the demands of being a single mom and a beginning teacher

caused this first year teacher to feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities. As a teacher who embraced a constructivist philosophy, she was deeply concerned about the quality of learning activities she provided her students. However, she was challenged by the students' previous learning experience – which was mostly traditional, didactic teaching experiences – since she employed a more cooperative learning method that requires student involvement. She also found classroom set-up, both physical and managerial, a challenge for her in the beginning of her career. It was difficult for her, because she had student taught in a classroom that was already set-up by her mentor teacher.

Similarly, the other participant, also a successful student teacher, had a great difficulty in her first year. She described spending a great deal of time to fill out paperwork in her first year. She was overwhelmed by the workload that she did not experience in her student teaching. Being the solely responsible teacher for her classroom, she thinks her first year teaching differ from her student teaching. Lack of support from her colleagues was an issue, although she had good support from her mentor assigned by the district. Overwhelmed by the overload work and other job related activities, she plans her lesson plans 3 weeks in advance. As much as she is

concerned with her students learning experience and performance, and is prepared ahead of the time, she did not have much time to modify instruction for students with various learning styles. Burke's study concluded, although "it is not possible to prepare teachers for all of the situations that a teacher may encounter" (p.201), it is crucial to give them support in their adjustment to their new role and responsibilities.

### **Current Study**

Established in 1885 as 'Tempe Normal School,' Arizona State University (ASU) emerged with a mission to train teachers to work in the public schools in the Arizona area (ASU History, n.d.). Since its establishment in 1885, ASU's teacher education program has become one of the largest in the United States.

The Early Childhood Education Certificate and Endorsement, approved by the Arizona State Board of Education in December, 2004, required Arizona teachers to obtain either certification or endorsement by July 1, 2009. To be eligible to teach in public schools for children from birth to kindergarten, teachers needed to obtain either certificate or endorsement. Under these new requirements, ASU made some changes in its existing Early Childhood Education (ECE) program to provide its enrolled early childhood education (ECE) students with an

opportunity to get certification or endorsement. In order to accomplish that goal, students needed to take some additional courses in early childhood and also needed to complete preschool student teaching in addition to their K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade student teaching. To include preschool student teaching into program of students who were already moving through the program, College faculty and administrators offered a split student teaching in the students' fourth and last semester. Therefore, in the last semester, students wishing to obtain the endorsement were offered a four-week preschool experience and a 12-week K-3 experience. Following this short-term arrangement, some changes made regarding student teaching for newly enrolled students. For students who were enrolled in 2006-2007 academic year, two student teachings experiences were systematically organized in the program – one nine-week preschool experience in their second semester and a 12-week K-3 experience in the fourth semester were required. Hence, students in ECE, Tempe Campus, between 2005–2009 experienced different student teaching arrangements than those who graduated earlier than 2004.

This study addressed the question of teacher preparation and self-efficacy based on the teaching model used in the ASU Tempe teacher education program. Specifically my goal was to examine the

models outcome by taking an in-depth look at beginning early childhood education teachers' experiences.

### **Research Questions**

- What effects do beginning teachers perceive that their split-student teaching experiences have on their experience as a new teacher?
- How do beginning teachers' prior schooling, and educational and personal backgrounds influence their current teaching?
- What role does home, family, and collegial support play as beginning teachers start their teaching career?

### **Parameters of this study**

Qualitative research methods and in-depth interview techniques were employed for this study. Unlike quantitative research methods, the number of participants for qualitative research methods is usually not in vast numbers. Therefore the number of participants were only limited to five. The reason of my choice of doing the research with such limited number was to investigate experiences of participants more intensely. As a result, in-depth analysis of these five beginning teacher experiences may not be generalized to other beginning teachers' experiences. In addition to this methodological limitation, there is also the concern regarding demographics of the participants.

Even though I did not have any preference regarding age, social class, gender, or any cultural background of participants of this study, demographics of participants shows similar patterns. All participants were female and coming from middle class families. Therefore, experiences of male teachers and teachers from different socio-economic background could not be examined. The number of participants chosen for this study also limited the diversity regarding cultural background.

Using in-depth interviews as sole data collection tool is another limitation of this study. Nevertheless, due to characteristics of this study and time limitation, it was considered that this method is the best option to gather information.

### **Terminology**

Since different institutions use different terminology, I felt that I needed to describe some of the commonly used terms in this study. The following descriptions are consistent with ASU's documents.

The term student teaching is defined as 'the culminating field experience' (ASU, 2005-2006 Catalog). As a requirement for all students who are enrolled in Early Childhood Education Program, ASU, student teaching is completed under a faculty supervisor from ASU and a mentor teacher from the placement school. K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade

student teaching assignment is completed in the last semester and it is a full day experience, scheduled from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. Monday through Friday. Preschool student teaching reflects the school experience also, therefore it is a half-day, four-days a week commitment. In their student teachings, students are expected to assume most, if not all, of the classroom responsibilities.

Internship is part of field experiences at ASU, it is completed in first, second, and third semester of the ECE program. Internships take 6-8 hours a week of students' time in an assigned Pre-K or K-3 classroom. Unlike student teaching that includes full teaching responsibilities, observation and the supervised participation is part of this assignment. The aim of these internships are to provide students with an opportunity to make connection between their learning in courses and real-life teaching, and prepare them to be ready for their student teachings.

This chapter, chapter 1, provides an introduction to this report by providing a brief description of reasoning of this study and of student teaching requirements applied after 2005 at ASU's teacher education program. Following the research questions, parameters of this study and terminology were also provided at the end of this chapter.



In the beginning of the following chapter, chapter 2, Erikson's psycho-social theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory are explicated as the theoretical framework of this work. I also presented an extensive related literature review focusing on studies done with pre-service and beginning teachers in chapter 2.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Theoretical Framework

Two overlapping psychosocial and socio-cultural theories are drawn upon in this study to examine how teachers may form their professional and personal identities early in their careers. The first is Erikson's psychosocial theory and the other is Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. These theories also form the framework that allows us to speculate why some teachers are more successful during their first year and what programmatic features worked for them in particular. While generalizations may not be possible over a large population, the analysis and its underlying assumptions may provide a launch pad for future researchers.

**Erikson's psychosocial theory.** Erikson's (1994) psychosocial theory of human development is commonly used to understand beginning teachers' experiences. Not only does his theory focus on early childhood, but also human development throughout adulthood. In Erikson's theory, every human being has the capacity to grow and to deal with personal and external problems (Maier, 1990). Erikson's theory focuses on how society shapes and influences a person's growing sense of ego and the quest for identity. Society is

seen as a positive force that fosters the growth and development of the self. Each stage pointed out by Erikson represents a crisis in form of gradually increasing conflicts; each represents a crucial moment where specific problems need to be solved so that the acting person can gain in maturity. If the crisis is resolved in a satisfactory manner, the ego moves on to the next stage, which would foster feelings of competence and self-confidence. On the other hand, failure to resolve the conflict would hinder the ego to develop and grow in a healthy manner and can lead to various mental health problems and maladjustments. Therefore, it brings a great deal of understanding to adult learning and development. Figure 1 provides a summary of Erikson's Theory.

<b>Erikson's Stage Theory in its Final Version</b>			
<i>Age</i>	<i>Conflict</i>	<i>Resolution or "Virtue"</i>	<i>Culmination in old age</i>
Infancy (0-1 year)	Basic trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Appreciation of interdependence and relatedness
Early childhood (1-3 years)	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Acceptance of the cycle of life, from integration to disintegration
Play age (3-6 years)	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Humor; empathy; resilience
School age (6-12 years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	Humility; acceptance of the course of one's life and unfulfilled hopes
Adolescence (12-19 years)	Identity vs. Confusion	Fidelity	Sense of complexity of life; merging of sensory, logical and aesthetic perception
Early adulthood (20-25 years)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Sense of the complexity of relationships; value of tenderness and loving freely
Adulthood (26-64 years)	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Caritas, caring for others, and agape, empathy and concern
Old age (65-death)	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Existential identity; a sense of integrity strong enough to withstand physical disintegration

*Figure 1* Erikson's stage theory in its final version. Adapted from "Erikson's Psychosocial Stages", [http://www.psywww.com/intropsych/ch11\\_personality/eriksons\\_psychosocial\\_stages.html](http://www.psywww.com/intropsych/ch11_personality/eriksons_psychosocial_stages.html)

As a dynamic process, identity formation holds a significant role in adulthood, and our childhood identifications forms the basis of our identity as we move from childhood, to late adolescence to adult lives. Young adults build their identity by becoming more conscious of their personal talents, interests, and ideological commitments. These eventually lead young adults to develop their vocational, ideological, and personal commitments (Hoare, 2001). Erikson (1959) suggests that if individuals do not form “a reasonable sense of identity” (p.95), they cannot move toward the next step to build an intimate relationship.

Developing her ideas based on Erikson’s identity development theory, Kroger (2002) maintains that Erikson did not touch upon or clarify some aspects of identity development such as “the ways in which identity components may change and be changed by the psychological task demands of adult development” (p. 2). Although her ideas stemmed from Erikson’s theory (Kroger, 2003), she has brought new perspectives to identity development. Kroger (2007) categorizes the human being’s life span into different stages based on chronological age and psychosocial tasks. According to her categorization, late adolescence falls between the ages of 18 and 22. Early adulthood falls between the ages of 23 and 39. Similar to Erikson’s psychosocial tasks,

Kroger holds that vocational and interpersonal roles are the main concerns during early adulthood, whereas individuals in their late adolescent stage are concerned with choosing a career path and building intimate relationships.

According to Erikson's theory, sometime during their twenties, young adults acquire a sense of intimacy and solidarity; this is the time that people also usually build a career and an intimate committed relationship. Thus, young adults' identity revolves mainly around their intimate relationships and vocational identity.

Erikson's emphasis on the impact of one's cultural surroundings on his/her development is also important in studying the development of teachers. Researchers have also pointed out that "[Erikson] stresses the undoubted influence of family, class, and society over the way we become fully human" (Simanowitz and Pearce, 2003, p.31). In his conversation with Evans (1967), Erikson discussed the formation of cultural identity and the impact that our culture or society has on us. He maintains that how we deal with society's imposition of cultural values impinges on our identity formation. Identity formation is the process of the development of the distinct personality of an individual, in a particular stage of life in which individual characteristics are possessed by which a person is recognized or known. This process

defines individuals to others and themselves. Pieces of the person's identity include a sense of continuity, a sense of uniqueness from others, and a sense of affiliation.

***The development of identity.*** Self-identity is the sum total of a being's knowledge and understanding of his or her self. The self-concept is different from self-consciousness, which is an awareness of one's self. Components of the self-concept include physical, psychological, and social attributes, which can be influenced by the individual's attitudes, habits, beliefs and ideas. Self-identity is inclusive of multiple aspects or components.

Cultural identity is the feeling of identification to a group or culture, or of an individual as far as s/he is influenced by her/his belonging to a group or culture. It may overlap or co-exist with *Ethnic identity* usually based on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry. Recognition by others as a distinct ethnic group is often a contributing factor to developing this bond of identification. Ethnic groups are also often united by common cultural, behavioral, linguistic, ritualistic, or religious traits.

This may also extend to a *national identity* where ethical/philosophical bonds unite a people who may share common ethnic identities or as the case in America do not.

*A professional identity* is the "persona" of a professional which is designed to accord with and facilitate the attainment of business objectives. A professional identity comes into being when there is a philosophy which is manifest in a distinct culture that share certain skills, values and beliefs.

**Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.** Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasizes the social aspect of understanding the human psyche, consciousness, and the essence of learning (Koshmanova, 2007). Van Huizen, van Oers, & Wubbles (2005) emphasize the importance of Vygotsky's work in studying paradigms of teacher education because "it concentrates on the connection between individual functioning and development and the socio-cultural practices in which individuals take part" (p.271).

Learning happens if one gains direct experience through social involvement in the learning process (Wegner, 1998). Looking from the Vygotskian perspective, an individual's participation in social learning and development practices allows him/her to become a stronger professional (van Huizen et al, 2005). Shepel (1995) also maintains that in a teacher's learning process, a key factor is experiencing meaning-making activities that offer an opportunity to construct a professional identity. By examining Vygotsky's development

perspective, Shepel describes teachers' self-identification: "In the process of learning, a teacher analyzes his or her professional stereotypes, modifies the methods of professional activity, finds his or her approach to a new curriculum, and creates an image of 'self-professional'" (p.441).

Teacher professional identity holds a significant place for the beginning teacher since it is "how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others" (Lasky, 2005, p.901). Identity formation is a social process as much as an inner-process (O'Connor, 2008). As beginning teachers enter the profession, they have an expectation to be accepted as a professional in order to build a professional identity. "The successful construction of an identity is not a wholly individual process; it involves acceptance by others who have already achieved membership in the community of practice" (p.192, Andrzejewski, 2008). Pinnegar (2005) argues the role of educators and teacher education programs on the student teachers' development of professional identity. She states:

Our programs practices and field experiences may not allow preservice teachers to successfully position themselves in appropriate teaching roles. Insecure in their own identity as a teacher, these beginning teachers may not develop discursive practices that support students in positioning themselves to successfully complete their identity development (p.276).



The communication, social interaction, values, and goals of the institutions and programs are part of teaching practice (van Huizen et al., 2005). All of these factors are embedded in the socio-cultural aspect of forming a teaching identity. As beginning teachers work in a new school culture, their identity formation processes should be studied from both a psychological and a socio-cultural perspective in order to understand how teacher identities emerge. Much contemporary theory propose that "identities are not simple, given, presumed essences that naturally unfold, but rather are produced in an ongoing process, mediated by multiple historical and contemporary factors" (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 38).

### **Research Regarding Teacher Preparation**

For the best educational outcomes, all countries need highly qualified teachers. D'Aniello (2008) points out that, like most other countries, there is a need in the United States for improving teacher education programs. She suggests that more studies should be done to examine the experience of beginning teachers. After an extensive examination of related studies on the subject, Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005a,b) pointed out the need for research on the outcome and quality of teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith, 2006). As editors of the report—*Studying Teacher Education*— they offer us a

broad overview of the works in the book, three general chapters, and nine research reviews. What type of research and the areas that research is needed are also suggested after the overview of each paper included in the book. Overall, in search of providing better educational opportunities for children, educators are pushed to do more research about teacher education programs and to design the best teacher education programs.

Cochran-Smith (2004) maintains that “research related to teacher preparation has been marginalized and underfunded for most of its history” (p.112). In particular, the number of studies done on teacher education programs is insufficient in the area of early childhood education. Early childhood education is commonly overlooked because most studies have focused on elementary or secondary programs (Goffin & Day, 1994). Fortunately, the education of young children and early childhood education (ECE) teachers are getting more attention as research shows the effectiveness of quality preschool on young children’s future and its economic benefits to the society in which they live (Barnett, 1992 &1998; Barnett & Kelley, 2006; Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006). The quality and quantity of teachers’ education is the foundation of a better learning environment for young children in the classroom (Barnett & Kelley,

2006). Tout, Zaslow, and Berry (2006) specifically state that “more education, particularly with specialization in early childhood development, is related to a higher quality of ECE programs and interactions between teachers and children” (p.79).

Additional studies of early childhood education programs are needed in order to improve the quality of pre-service teachers’ education. Likewise, though field experience is considered a major component of teacher education programs in student teachers learning to teach, it too is grossly under-researched (Ben-Peretz & Rumney, 1991; Goodlad, 1990; Zeichner & Conklin, 2005; Griffin, 1989).

Although teacher preparation is crucial, how programs organize their requirements and how well fieldwork prepares prospective teachers varies greatly across the United States (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008).

Student teaching is a vital component of teacher education programs and is the transition “tool” in the transformation from student to teacher. Consequently, student teaching will be focal point of this study.

In studying student teaching, I will be focusing on the following factors which previous researchers (Zeichner and Conklin, 2008, p.276) recognize must be taken into account in evaluating and improving student teaching:

- Number, length, and type of field experiences in the program
- How closely they are connected to the rest of the course content
- Level of teaching responsibility the interns are provided
- Extent to which they build on prior field experiences.
- Student teaching experiences hold a strategic function for the survival of beginning teachers.

Lucas (1997) places heavy emphasis on field experience and describes teaching as a “practical art unlikely to be mastered through academic study” (p.271). In this practical art, teacher candidates can learn how to become a teacher through observation and supervised practice through first-hand experience, and trial and error. Vartuli and Rohs (2009) suggest that “when fieldwork and coursework were combined as in the study teacher education program, prospective teachers apply what they learn in class to real-life experiences and learning enhanced” (p.323). With ongoing support, guidance, and feedback from mentors during the apprenticeship, novices are able to improve their newly acquired skills related to one’s major are vitally important when an individual moves into their teaching career (Hoffman et al. 2005).

Student teaching also creates a positive attitude among individuals who are already in the profession. Henke, Chen, and Geis

(2000) interviewed 11,200 third-year teachers, as part of the 1993 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, and these interviews revealed that teachers who had student teaching experiences would more likely choose a teaching career again, if they were given a choice. Results of this study also demonstrated that teachers who majored in an education-related area were more likely to be satisfied with their career choice and therefore stayed in their teaching career longer than those who majored in a non-education subject. Additionally, participants of this study who completed more pedagogy courses during their teacher preparation program also stayed longer in their teaching career.

Green, Hamilton, Kampton, and Ridgeway (2005) conducted an inquiry to explore factors of retention and attrition on graduates of a five-year program. Students of this program completed their student teaching in two placements—8 weeks in the fall semester and 14 weeks in the spring semester—in the fifth year of the program. In response to a question, participants of this study typically stated that student teaching experience was highly effectual in preparing them for their teaching career. On the other hand, graduates who did not start their teaching career or who left the profession reported unfavorable student teaching experience as one the reasons for their career choice.

In conclusion, researchers of this study maintain that graduates' positive attitude toward the program was due to their student teaching experience.

In most teacher preparation programs, student teaching occurs in the final semester of the program. The reasoning behind this approach is to allow pre-service teachers an opportunity to gain the pedagogical knowledge prior to the practical experiences. Some teacher education programs provide student teaching in the beginning of the program as well as at the conclusion of the program.

Students benefit from this practice in various ways. First, students get a better understanding of the demand of the teaching profession. Second, they can begin to understand the culture of a school environment as a work place. Last but not least, the knowledge they acquire in their coursework might make better sense in context. For example, application of theories can be seen firsthand and might enable pre-service teachers to put theory into practice (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005). For instance, a study done with 139 undergraduate students in the teacher-education program, 61 students with 30 hours of early field experience, and 78 students without any early field experience revealed that “students with early field experiences performed significantly better in their methods course

than those without early field experience” (p. 401) (Denton, 1982 cited as in Darling-Hammond, et al. 2005).

In an extensive review of literature investigating learning-to-teach studies between 1978 and 1991, Kagan (1992) examined 27 studies done with pre-service teachers, and 13 studies done with first-year or beginning teachers. Kagan starts with some assumptions regarding pre-service and beginning teachers’ experiences:

Preservice and first-year teaching appears to constitute a single developmental stage during which novices accomplish three primary tasks: (a) acquire knowledge of pupils; (b) use that knowledge to modify and reconstruct their personal images of self as teacher; and (c) develop standard procedural routines that integrate classroom management and instruction. In general, preservice programs fail to address these tasks adequately (p.129).

In this review, Kagan categorized studies done with pre-service students into five thematic clusters: the role played by preexisting beliefs and images early in a teacher education program; (b) requisites for growth during practica and student teaching; (c) what can happen when novices try to teach with little knowledge of pupils and procedures; (d) the central role played by a novice’s image of self as

teacher; and (e) comprehensive evaluations of practica or student teaching (p.133).

Research on “the role played by pre-existing beliefs and images early in a teacher education program” showed that rather than focusing on children’s actions, pre-service teachers focused on their own actions. On the other hand, their own beliefs and prior experiences in classrooms affected their connection to the course contents. Moreover, they were positive about themselves as prospective teachers. The second theme, “requisites for growth during practica and student teaching”, revealed that as student teachers progressed in the program, their focus shifted toward children’s needs and learning and away from a focus on themselves.

Using various tools, student teachers also evaluated their success as teachers. Teacher candidates viewed their future teaching career from an optimistic lens. Effects of student teachers’ prior experiences in the classroom on their views about the program were also worthy to mention. Lack of connection between course contents and in-classroom practices was referred to by student teachers in addition to a focus on “too much theory” rather than “practice” in courses. Studies under “what can happen when novices try to teach with little knowledge of pupils and procedures” category showed



various outcomes related to efficacy, but a decrease in efficacy of student teachers as they progressed through their field experiences was common. Feeling less confident, their attitudes changed toward a more controlling one. They also focused more on planning rather than children's learning. In one study, it was observed that student teachers adopted the teaching practices in the school where they student taught, instead of the ones that were encouraged in their program. Another study showed that expectations from student teachers were high, such as functioning as a professional. The fourth theme was "the central role played by a novice's image of self as teacher". It is revealed that student teachers need a clear and strong self-image so they can develop a strong professional identity. Without that they will not imitate their mentor during student teaching, which reduces their survival in the profession.

Research on "comprehensive evaluations of practica or student teaching experiences" is the final theme mentioned by Kagan (1992). A Review of one study under this category revealed that "teacher educators oversimplify the reality of student teaching and ignore many social and pedagogical variable that can affect a novice's instructional decisions" (p.148). Other studies showed a common problem in teacher

preparation programs that is a disconnection between the theory they learned in classes and applicability in the classrooms.

Kagan (1992) also sorted studies of beginning teachers into three thematic clusters: “(a) the need to acquire knowledge of pupils and apply it to the image of self as teachers, (b) the role played by context, and (c) the growth in problem solving skills” (p. 150). Among the studies he reviewed, one study showed that first-year teachers learned through trial and error. In another study teachers felt unprepared from their program for their first year of teaching. Making a connection between their own schooling experiences to their students’ experiences was also found in beginning teachers’ studies. His review of studies on beginning teachers also indicated a stronger ability toward solving problems encountered in the classroom end of their first year of teaching. On the other hand, they were reluctant to change their pre-existing personal beliefs and images formed before they entered the program and profession. Regarding the practica and courses taken in the program, teachers surprisingly concurred that the number and length of practica are not enough and information presented in their college courses do not relate to what they practice in classrooms. Finally, studies showed a lack of preparedness in procedural knowledge among beginning teachers while in the program,

and they spend a great deal of time on procedural knowledge when they start teaching.

To understand one student teacher's experience during student teaching, Rushton (2001) did a case study with a 22 year-old female student teacher. By utilizing in-depth interviews, reflections, and discussion, Rushton concluded that the participant's view on teaching and life in general was deeply affected by this experience. Starting her student teaching with great confidence, she later found herself questioning her confidence. Her satisfaction toward the program also changed as she moved forward in her student teaching. While she felt that the university had prepared her for student teaching and her inner-city placement, this attitude changed toward a more negative one. Dealing with children with diverse background and problems is one of the reasons for her frustration with the program. On the other hand, she benefited from the challenges she encountered in her classroom. Rushton claims that "in this study, Mary's sense of growth, maturity, and well-being developed as a result of conflict resolutions" (p.158).

In another study, Bullough et al., (2002) compared two different types of student teaching placements. In this study, 21 pre-service student teachers were interviewed to compare the effectiveness of solo-

placement versus partner-placement student teaching. In solo-placement, student teachers received less intervention by their mentor teachers; whereas, in partner-placement, the mentor teacher was much more involved in the student teachers' teaching. The data revealed that student teachers who worked in the partner-placement program felt more positive and confident about their teaching than those in the solo-placement program. Moreover, partner-placement students stated that they felt they were supported emotionally more than their counterparts. While single-placement student teachers expressed emotional isolation and struggled more in maintaining discipline in the classroom.

Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001) conducted a study to do a comparison of two different student teaching placements in a university based teacher education program. In these two different placements, student teachers' school sites, timing of their placement, and responsibilities of their cooperating teachers varied. While the group that was described as a traditional program did a student teaching of three ten-week placements starting from early October, the other group did a full year of student teaching starting from late August. In this quantitative study, a total of 26 student teachers participated, and questionnaires, interviews, and observation

techniques were utilized to collect the data. Student teachers from both groups reported discipline and classroom management as the biggest problem during their student teaching.

Even though slightly different, organizing class work, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, determining the learning level of students, their role as a teacher, and assessing student work were also the common problems stated by student teachers. Managing time, finding resources, organizing work, inability to try out their own ideas were also stated as problems by student teachers in the traditional group. On the other hand, both groups viewed student teaching as the highest component of their program, and they overall had positive comments regarding the program. In conclusion, researchers of this study suggested a full year of student teaching to ease the transition of student teachers' to the teaching career.

Twenty early childhood graduates participated in a study conducted by Vartuli and Rohs (2009). As a follow-up study of program effectiveness, this study examined prospective teachers' shift of pedagogical beliefs over time. Results of this study suggest that prospective teachers' thoughts about pedagogy, content, and practice were changed by the practices and assignment in their teacher

education program. Vartuli and Rohs claim that “it is through the prospective teachers’ implementation of course ideas that their beliefs were able to be changed” (p.322). Based on the result of this study, researchers suggest teacher educators look at beliefs of prospective teachers and find strategies to help them to examine and change these beliefs. In regard to these suggestions, Vartuli and Rohs put emphasis on field placements and student teaching.

Fantilli and McDougall (2009) interviewed five beginning teachers with one to three years of teaching experience to understand the challenges and support they encountered. One teacher, with three years of experience, expressed his feelings of isolation and frustrations with regard to the school culture and his own ideal way of teaching in his first year as a teacher. Work overload was the biggest challenge for another teacher with two years of teaching experience. This teacher overcame challenges faced in her first year with support from relatives, colleagues, and fellow graduates. Another teacher with two years experience also revealed her feelings of frustration and lack of time in her first year. Difficulties and challenges in her first year of teaching made her think that her pre-service education should have prepared her better by focusing on more practice than theory. Finally, one teacher in her first year of teaching complained about not having

enough time for her personal relationship due to the massive amount of classroom preparation.

A recent study (Oh, Ankers, Llamas, & Tomyoy, 2005) was conducted with 204 in-service teachers in regard to their student teaching and its effects on their career goals, effective measures, and classroom teaching. Data for this study were collected from teachers who had pre-service student teaching and who did not, and researchers compared the data among these two groups. Teachers who had pre-service student teaching experience were more likely to be credentialed, 82%, compared to those entered the profession without pre-service student teaching experience, 39%. Beginning teachers with pre-service student teacher were highly satisfied with their job, while job satisfaction of their counterparts was significantly lower.

Furthermore, teachers who had pre-service student teaching stated that their student teaching experiences were very helpful in their job. On the other hand, while there were differences between these two groups in terms of efficacy, enjoyment of classroom teaching, staying in teaching, and building professional relationships, the differences were not found to be statistically significant. However, those who had student teaching with continuous support and mentorship reported a substantial difference on their intention to stay in the profession

compared to those who had little, or no support or mentorship. In summary, the results of this research indicate positive long-term outcomes influenced by pre-service student teaching on beginning teachers' job satisfaction and teacher retention, especially with the help of constant mentorship (Oh, Ankers, Llamas, & Tomyoy, 2005).

Timostsuk and Ugaste (2010) conducted a study with 45 student teachers from various teacher education programs to inquire about their understanding and description of their professional identity. In this qualitative research, researchers found intriguing results. Participants of this study saw interpersonal relationship with others such as students, other teachers, and university teachers, as important. They valued their relationship with senior teachers and students. On the other hand, their families' and friends' support was crucial in their adjustment to their new role. Researchers also found out that student teachers carry a great deal of fear of failure as a teacher. However, their fear of failure eased as their students started to perceive them as qualified teachers.

Participants of this study also felt that although they were in need of support from school teachers and university supervisors, that unfortunately they did not get this support. Not getting enough support and supervision in the classroom where situations change



constantly also resulted in negative emotions about the teaching experience among student teachers. Not feeling a part of the teaching community was another interesting result. These teacher candidates felt that they were not accepted by other teachers, and therefore, did not feel that they belonged to that community. As the study of Timostsuk and Ugaste (2010) reveals interesting results, it also brings about some concerns regarding the teaching experience of student teachers and the outcomes that they carry into their first year of teaching. Entering teaching with a high level of negative feelings regarding their teaching and identity might result in leaving the career after their first year, or not entering the career at all.

One early childhood, teacher-education program was examined and discussed by Mueller, Wisneski, and File (2010) through the portfolios and conversations of students in the program. In their examination of students' exit-from-the program portfolios, Mueller et al. (2010) found out that there is "a lack of connection to the field of EC, or an explicit disconnect from taking on the roles and responsibilities related to the complex acts of teaching and learning" (p.77). Students perceived the issues or topics covered in their courses as repetitive in nature. Another compelling result from this analysis was regarding students' biases and assumptions with which they

entered the program. Even though student teachers are encouraged to be critical toward biases and beliefs throughout the courses they have taken, “when they found themselves in real-life teaching experiences with live children they reverted back to their already-established biases and assumptions steeped in dominant culture beliefs about race, SES, gender, sexuality, and childhood” (p.77). Their examination and discussion of the shortages of the program led Mueller et al. (2010) to come up with some ideas to improve the program. The following table shows a summary of these ideas.

Table 1

Program Big Ideas

Big ideas categories	Subheadings as category descriptors
Curriculum development	Educational aims, planning, content, assessment, theories of knowledge and learning
Respect of child	Theories of/ways of viewing childhood assessment/individualization, families, cultural framing, advocacy
Situatedness in the larger sociocultural and historical context	Democratic communities, social justice, critical thinking, geographical and economic features (specifically urban)
Personhood/self-understanding	Cultural framing/reframing, mindfulness, passion, self-reflection, voice, agency
Professionalism	Advocacy for self and others, ethics, socialization into field, intentionality, critical thinking and decision-making, teamwork
Human interconnectedness	Families, communities, diversity within human groups, care for others and the environment peace

(Mueller et al., 2010, p.79)

Mogharreban, MyIntyre, and Raisor (2010) studied pre-service early childhood teachers intentionality in a program that employed split student teaching: one pre-kindergarten assignment and one primary level assignment. Intentionality was defined as “directed,

designed interactions between children and teachers in which teachers purposefully challenge, scaffold, and extend children's skill" (Pianta as cited in Epstein, 2007, p.4). Among other findings, student teachers did not make a connection between what they knew and were aware of and what they applied in their practice. In other words, intentionality was absent in their practice during their student teaching. Analyzing the results, Mogharreban et al. (2010) stated that "entering a classroom at mid-semester or leaving one after just 8 weeks might not allow for a deep level of reflection that more time would offer" (p.244).

Another study focusing on five pre-service early childhood student teachers' field experiences also examined a program in a private institution of higher education (Recchia, Beck, Esposito, and Tarrant 2009). In this program, students were offered a dual early childhood/ early childhood special education certification. As a requirement of this study, pre-service students were required to complete five field placements. Student teachers' roles ranged from more observation and less active teaching to more active teaching. Employing a qualitative research method, Recchia, et al. (2009) analyzed these pre-service students' experiences by examining various artifacts such as assessments, assignments, field-based journals, and final portfolios.

They categorized the result under three categories—professional collaboration, understanding and responding to children, and curricular decisions—and they presented student teachers’ before, during and after thoughts about these three main themes. Analysis of the data revealed that student teachers were concerned regarding collaboration among professionals in the classroom and the impact of professional collaboration on students’ learning. As their concern related to professional collaboration was about lack of communication, their view changed during and end of their student teaching. Even though they were concerned about both these issues, they viewed the issue of professional collaboration as a more complex issue. Another issue, understanding and responding to children, was a concern as well. Having 25 or more students in their classroom, student teachers were challenged as well as satisfied when they made meaningful connections with children.

On the other hand, they found it hard “to find time and to pay attention and respond to individual differences” (Recchia, et al. 2009, p.115). However, with experience, they developed their ability to see the children’s learning capabilities, expanded their communication abilities with children to meet children’s needs, and improved their skills to respond individual children’s needs. Curricular decisions were

another concern that emerged in this study. Students expressed an incompatibility between the curricula adopted in their student teaching placement and the curricula they were taught in the program. As they gained more experience, they started to look at the issue in a more complex way. Examination of their beliefs and practices, experimentation with different styles of teaching, and discovering a variety of curricular choices were some changes in student teachers' views regarding curricular decisions.

In conclusion, student teachers benefited from their student teaching experiences in many ways: 1) they gain valuable insight into new strategies and new practices in diverse classroom settings; 2) they refine their own expectations, personal beliefs, and priorities; 3) they learn to adapt to the classroom, making the connection between their theoretical learning about ECD and real-life classroom experiences; 4) they learn to respond to the individual needs of children; and 5) they gain an understanding of the value of differentiated instruction from diverse curricular models.

A recent study by Capuozzo (2007) inquired about the effects of new requirements accepted by the State of Arizona regarding certification of early childhood educators. Capuozzo investigated the outcomes of the new program under new revisions required by the

State of Arizona, and how these changes, especially an additional preschool student teaching experience, made an impact on student teachers' perceptions regarding the new program, student teachers' experiences in the program, and their experience in preschool placement. Capuozzo used various data gathering methods, which included observations of student teachers during focus group interviews, student teachers' reflections as a part of one course requirement, student teachers' journal entries, and official documents. He found that participants of the study expressed dissatisfaction toward a preschool placement in the beginning of their student teaching. However, their feelings of dissatisfaction eased as they spent time in the preschool setting and realized that preschool teaching is not much different than any other teaching job. Capuozzo also found that students who were placed in settings with children of diverse groups such as ELL students, low SES, or non-white children were not happy with their placements in the beginning. However, their attitudes changed as well, as they had positive experiences and as they spent more time in the setting. Another outcome of this study was related to student teachers' experiences in special education classrooms. Student teachers' discomfort toward being placed in classrooms with children with disabilities faded away with experience

and time. While they were focused on “disabilities” of children in the beginning, they started to see these students as any other typical student and began to only focus on these children’s learning styles and needs.

Based on his findings, Capuozzo (2007) concluded that, overall, the participants of this study had positive experiences and that they benefited from their preschool student teaching placements.

Additionally, they changed their views toward preschool education, classrooms with children from diverse backgrounds, special education classrooms, and working with special need children. Capuozzo makes recommendations for the teacher education program, even though his intention with study was not to do a program evaluation. Some of his recommendations are: 1) preschool student teaching placement should not be optional; 2) continuous evaluations of the program should be conducted to get feedback from students; 3) students should be thoroughly informed as they move forward in the program and before student teaching begins; 4) mentors should continue supervision of student teachers; 5) student teachers should have an assigned and permanent advisor as well as a clinical supervising professor during their student teaching; 6) the program should reevaluate roles and purposes of student teachers’ supervisors from ASU; and 7) the



university should present a clear, formally defined program organization and expectations.

Latimer (2009) conducted a study with 6 beginning teachers who followed alternative (fifth year programs) routes to obtain teacher certification. In this mixed-methods study, teachers reported that they had difficulty in managing the classroom in the beginning of their career, meeting diverse needs of their students, and that they spent too much time preparing for their classroom. Although they struggled to meet the needs of their students with diverse backgrounds, they made this a high priority. Even though they were faced with many challenges, they stated the benefits of support from colleagues on their team.

Another noteworthy outcome was related to participants' prior schooling, preparation, and experiences before starting teaching. For example, the beginning teachers reported that they felt poorly prepared by their certification program. Latimer (2009) maintains that the nature of the alternative programs through which these teachers were certified is one of the reasons for inefficient preparedness. Latimer recommends the following: 1) University – district partnership; 2) a shift from theory to explicit practice; 3) increasing the amount of field experiences; and 4) more support from

the district for beginning teachers. When new graduates enter the teaching profession, they are commonly put into large classrooms which can be very challenging for beginning teachers. Excessive and time consuming workloads and assignments are also demanding as new graduates try to figure out how to manage all of these requirements (Johnson & Kardos, 2008).

Ryan (1986) uses “the curve of disenchantment” (p.8) to describe the changing attitudes of beginning teachers toward teaching. He suggests that beginning teachers start the profession with a positive attitude, and in the first five months, this takes a dramatic turn toward a negative attitude. Even though their attitude again rises slowly, it never reached the beginning level. He claims that this disenchantment, caused by the unsuccessful and unpleasant early experiences, is the possible reason beginning teachers leave the profession. Student teaching, which is a sheltered reality check, confirms student teachers’ fantasy of a bright future career. As they student teach in an already set up classroom and culture, they do not realize the hard work that they will encounter in their first years of teaching.

Pre-service education of teachers includes student teaching or field experience, which is usually completed during the last year of

preparation. Unlike many pre-service teacher education programs, ASU's teacher education program at Tempe requires students to do student teaching in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and also in their last (4<sup>th</sup>) year in the program. Because ASU's program uses a different student teaching model than most other pre-service teacher education programs, there is a need to study its outcomes and present the results for future programming decisions. Thus, in this study, I focused on experiences of graduates who were enrolled before and after the new state requirements for early childhood certification and endorsement.

### **The Early Childhood Pre-service Program at ASU**

Arizona State University's undergraduate, early childhood teacher education program at Tempe campus trains teacher candidates in eight consecutive semesters. The ECD program under COE required its students to complete courses in specific areas. These courses included foundation coursework, courses in child development, exceptional children's education, infants and toddlers, children's literature and families. In addition to COE's required courses, the first 4 semesters include courses from the following areas: first year composition; university general studies; humanities/fine arts and social/behavioral sciences; natural sciences; literacy and critical inquiry; and mathematics and statistics/computer applications.

Since 2006, the ECD program at ASU requires its students to do their student teaching experiences in two different settings.

Arizona State University's teacher education program has been restructured several times in the last two decades to train teachers to teach children more effectively by responding to their individual needs and learning demands. One of the reasons for this restructuring was to respond to new licensing requirements by the State. To serve young children's needs, the state of Arizona has required individuals working with young children to obtain either EC licensing or endorsement by January, 2009. Responding to these new requirements, ASU added preschool student teaching into its old program and newly restructured program.

This chapter was intended to provide a brief theoretical framework including Erikson's psychosocial theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory to make meaningful analysis of beginning teachers' experiences. Furthermore, a related literature review of student teaching studies and beginning teachers' studies was presented in this chapter.

The following chapter focuses on the methodology employed in this study. Essentially, I explicate the logic behind the selection of the

modes of inquiry, the data sources, and the data analysis tools which are the case studies and the subsequent thematic analysis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### **Modes of Inquiry and Data sources**

Individuals who enter the teaching profession the first time have to deal with various difficulties. For example, they have to prove themselves to school professionals, administration, parents, children, and themselves; to learn classroom management; to shape their identity; and to cope with all of the problems they face for the first time. It is assumed that teacher education programs train and prepare teachers before they enter the profession. It is believed that it is the teacher education program's responsibility to give the required knowledge and skills to those who want to be teachers. Therefore, as soon as they enter the profession, they would be able to teach with a high degree of competence and knowledge. As a part of the teacher preparation program, teaching experience gained before entering the profession contributes a great deal in beginning teachers' survival in the school. Thus, studying pre-service teaching practices in teacher education programs and examining the impacts on beginning teachers' experiences in the profession will allow universities to improve their teacher preparation programs.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and better understand the impact of student teaching and teacher preparation programs on beginning teachers' experiences as emerging professionals. When beginning teachers enter the field, they face many difficulties that can be both internal and external. While they are trying to define/refine their identity as a teacher, they also struggle to meet their students' needs, to meet the requirements of being a member of a school community, and to meet with the expectations of the school administration. The ability to manage all these demands may rest, in part, on their prior experience as a student teacher. Further, their resilience may depend on other factors, such as their preparation in the university in general, their current school environment, their support at school, and their support from family and friends at home.

A cohort model "in which a group of students begin and end the program of study together by taking a prescribed sequence of courses" (Locklear, Davis, & Covington, 2009) is used in Arizona State University (ASU)'s teacher education program. Pre-service education of teachers includes student teaching or field experience, which is usually completed during the last year of preparation. Unlike many pre-service teacher education programs, ASU's Early Childhood

teacher education program in Tempe requires its students to have two student teaching experiences before their graduation: This requirement began in fall 2006 and continues to evolve (See Table 2).

Table 2

Evolution of changing field requirements over the past decade

Cohort	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4
2000–2005	Internship	Internship	Internship	Student Teaching — K–3 / 15 weeks
2006–2007	Internship	Internship	Internship	K–3 Student Teaching: 11–13 weeks Preschool student teaching: 2–4 weeks.
2007 – 2008 Fall	Internship	Internship	Internship	K–3 Student teaching: 11 weeks Preschool student teaching: 4 weeks
2007 – 2008 Spring	Internship	Pre-K student teaching: 9 weeks	Internship	K–3 Student teaching: 12 weeks
2008–2009	Internship	Pre-K student teaching: 9 weeks	Internship	K–3 Student teaching: 12 weeks
2009–2010	Internship	Pre-K student teaching: 9 weeks	Internship	K–3 Student teaching: 12 weeks

The typical program at ASU now involves one 9-week preschool experience and one 12-week K–3 experience. The preschool requirement is met during the 2nd block, and the K–3 is completed during the 4th block. The early student teaching experience in the



second semester of the program is unique, and there is a need to study it and present the result for future references. However, not all participants in this study follow this exact scenario in their student teaching. One exception to these student teaching experiences involves the students who choose to do their student teaching in another country under a program offered by ASU. One of the participants of this study completed her K–3 student teaching in another country in an English-taught kindergarten for 16 weeks. Her other student teaching was 9 weeks in an Arizona preschool.

When beginning teachers enter the profession they face many difficulties. They are trying to refine their own identities as a teacher while struggling to meet their students' needs and integrate into the school community. Teacher identity formation is developed from 4 to 7 years in their career (Carter & Doyle, 1996). Although the aim of this study is to examine the impact of student teaching on beginning teachers' experiences in the profession, factors that might influence their experiences along with student teaching should not be disregarded. Such factors might include their university preparation in general, the school environment in which they work, the support they receive at school, and the support they receive from family and friends.

The number of participants for this study is limited to five. In order to acquire a profound insight of student teaching's impact on beginning teachers, three second-year and two third-year teachers were selected for this study. Recruitment of participants was done through ASU's records. With the help of ASU's faculty and advisement staff, a participant recruitment letter was sent to ASU's graduates of Tempe, Mary Lou Fulton College of Education, Early Childhood Education (ECE) program between 2006 and 2009. After individuals responded to the email that was sent, 5 of them were found to be qualified for this study. Qualifications included being a graduate of Tempe EC teacher education program, employed in a grade level under 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and residing in Arizona. Later, individual interviews and focus group interviews were set up over a 3-week period. Starting from May 10, I conducted first and second individual interviews by allowing one week break between them for each individual. One week after the individual interviews were done, I conducted the focus group interview, which was at the end of May.

The data collection method used for this study was qualitative. Fairbrother (2007) maintains that events, processes, and behaviors are the focus of a qualitative approach. Accordingly, many levels and

dimensions of a community/group can be studied through this method.

He describes it more extensively as:

Qualitative researchers tend towards providing rich, deep, detailed descriptions. Such detail contributes to explaining participants' perspectives and developing an understanding of the meanings they attach to the phenomena of interest. At the same time, qualitative researchers do go beyond pure description to analyze, interpret and offer explanations of complex situations and phenomena (p.44).

Giving an extensive account of case study methods, Stake (1995) claims that the researcher's aim is to get a thorough understanding of the cases studied through qualitative research. Unlike other research designs, research questions are subject to modification or replacement during the study if "new issues become apparent" (p.9). Even though universal generalizations are not the aim and do not emerge from qualitative research, researchers "draw their own conclusions" (p.9), which are referred to as "assertions" (Erickson as cited in Stake, 1995).

Similarly, Yin (1981) talks about the possibility of modification of questions and propositions as the study progresses. On the other hand, he clarifies the need to develop study questions and study propositions before starting data collection in order to have a clear aim in obtaining relevant information from participants. Yet, he warns about the possibility of being tempted to cover everything about individuals, if one is not focused on relevant information (Yin, 2009).

To collect the relevant data for this study, two face-to-face individual interviews and one focus group discussion were conducted. Therefore, graduates employed in Arizona were chosen among those who wanted to participate. I used two interview types. The first is a semi-structured in-depth interview. This type of data collection tool allows the researcher and participant to engage in a conversation with the researcher defining and controlling situation (Kvale, 2009). As I asked the participants open-ended questions, I was reluctant to interfere as they talked. Gerson and Horowitz (2002) suggest “in-depth interviews should, of course, always leave room to discover the unexpected and unknown” (p.204). On the other hand, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) describe in-depth interviews as “repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words” (p.77). As they also emphasize, in-depth interviews give researchers an opportunity to gather information regarding participants’ past experiences, which is not otherwise possible. In this study my intention was to understand beginning teachers’ experiences by looking through their past experiences prior to their teaching career. On the other hand, through interviews, I was able to discover participants’ “subjective experiences

and attitudes” (Perakyla, 2005, p.869), which may have been inaccessible otherwise.

Even though there was a set of questions formed prior to the individual interviews, I allowed participants to express their experiences with broader questions such as:

- Can you tell me about your student teaching experiences?
- Can you tell me about your first-year teaching experiences ?
- Can you tell me about the process after graduation until your employment as a teacher?

As participants covered the topics that I brought up, I only asked specific questions if they did not cover it in their conversations.

The other interview type employed in this study is the focus group interview. This type of interview allows researchers to get “different viewpoints on an issue” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 150). In the focus group methods, the researcher introduces the topics for discussion and facilitates the interchange and provides an atmosphere in which the participants express their personal and sometimes conflicting viewpoints (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Drawing on Lather’s perspective, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) see the focus group interviews in the following way:

Focus groups, while functioning as sites for consolidating collective identities and enacting political work, also allow for the proliferation of multiple meanings and perspectives as well as for interactions between and among them. Because focus groups put multiple perspective “on the table”, they help researchers and research participants alike to realize that both the interpretations of individuals and the norms and rules of groups are inherently situated, provisional, contingent, unstable, and changeable (p.904).

These interview styles are chosen because they stimulate dialogue through human interaction and facilitate the emergence of knowledge (Kvale, 1996). Interviews done with beginning teachers were conducted twice over a 3-week time frame, (see Table 2). The first interviews took place in the middle of May, 2010. A second set of interviews were conducted toward the end of May, 2010. The focus group discussion followed the second round of interviews, at the end of May, 2010. Focus group discussion questions were formulated after completion of first and second sets of interviews. One of the reasons to conduct a focus group interview after individual interviews was to discuss the common, crucial themes that emerged in the first and second round interviews. Another reason was to discuss some untouched themes that are considered to be important by the researcher. Moreover, it was important to discuss some issues that participants disagreed on, and clarify the reasons for their disagreements.

A video recorder was used to collect the data. A video-recording tool was used because it easily captures the details of interviews while allowing the researcher to interact in real-time. This collection tool also allowed me an opportunity to analyze more subtle cues in facial responses and body language. Following the completion of each interview round and focus group discussion, all collected data was transcribed in order to be coded and analyzed. The transcription process of the interviews took place in the following two months after all interviews were completed.

Nationally, most new graduates from undergraduate teacher education programs are 25 years old or younger (NCES, 2008). Four participants were 25 years old or younger – traditional-aged student (Keup, 2008), and only one participant was in her 30's – non-traditional student (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Keup, 2008) – at the time of graduation. All five participants in the study were beginning teachers employed in K–3<sup>rd</sup> grade level classrooms at the time of interviews. Thus, these participants are generally believed to be representative of the student body at the time of the study. Table 3 provides specific information on the profile of each participant.

Table 3

## Participants' field experiences

Name	Age	Cohort Time	Experience	Type of School
Belle	41	2006 – 2007	Preschool: 4 weeks K–3: 11 weeks	Public School Public School: Kindergarten
Olive	25	2007 – 2008	Preschool: 9 weeks K–3: 16 weeks	Public School S. America: Kindergarten
Libby	25	2005 – 2007	Preschool: 4 weeks K–3: 11 weeks	Public School Public School: Kindergarten
Sofia	28	2006 – 2007	Preschool: 4 weeks K–3: 11 weeks	Charter School Public School: Kindergarten
Kayla	25	2006 – 2007	Preschool: 4 weeks K–3: 11 weeks	Public School Public School: 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade

Participants of this study graduated between 2007 and 2008.

Having met prerequisite coursework and experience (such as general studies courses and COE requirement courses), they were enrolled in the ECD program between 2005 and 2006. The ECD program at ASU requires its students to complete courses and field based experiences in four consecutive semesters. While allowing students some exceptions



to this schedule, ASU suggests to most students to follow the proposed program. When participants of this study were admitted to the program, there was only one K–3 student teaching experience to be completed in the final semester, in addition to 3 internships to be completed in previous semesters. As the State changed the requirements, these individuals were offered an additional preschool, student teaching internship. Therefore, the length of the K–3 grade placement was reduced from 15 to 12 weeks in order to add a 4-week preschool student teaching experience in their last semester.

### **Data Analysis**

To explore the effectiveness of pre-service teaching experiences and other factors that might influence beginning teachers' practice in their first years of teaching, a standardized set of questions was created that focused on the following aspects of their backgrounds:

- participants' cultural and educational background;
- their own schooling experiences;
- teacher preparation experiences;
- participants' student teaching experiences;
- graduation and employment process;
- current school/work environment;

- interprofessional /administrative support at work/school;  
and
- family/ friend support.

Results of this study are presented in two separate parts. The case studies are collected and presented in Chapter 4, while the common themes that emerged throughout the individual and focus group interviews are presented in Chapter 5. The following methods are utilized in organization and analysis of these two finding chapters.

**Case studies.** I interviewed participants of this study on two different occasions; each one lasted about an hour for each individual. To give an extensive sense of their experiences, each individual's story is given in the case studies. Stake (1998) calls this type of approach "collective case studies" (p.89) and describes them this way:

It is not the study of a collective but instrumental study extended to several cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest the common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having voice. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases (p.89).

Even though these type of case studies are more concerned with representation than other types of case studies, due to the small sampling size, it is unlikely that researchers conducting this type of

case study claim representation of a larger group or population (Stake, 1995).

In his earlier work, Stake (1995), similarly, points out the intention of qualitative case studies as “thick description”, “experiential understanding”, and “multiple realities” (p.43). He put emphasis on the “understanding of human experience” rather than “seeking to identify cause and affect relationship” (p.38).

**Thematic analysis.** Thematic analysis is a form of analysis in which data is fragmented into thematic categories. Riessman (2008) maintains that this type of analysis can be applied to various data types such as case studies of individuals and groups. Additionally, she clarifies “theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take is an established tradition with a long history in qualitative inquiry” (p.74).

Formation of themes may show variety, as well. Themes can be generated prior to data collection based on theories or existing literature, or it can be generated from research data (Boyatzis, 1998). Boyatzis argues that thematic analysis in qualitative research creates ways for researchers to make a connection between his/her “findings,

and interpretation of meaning to others who are using different methods”(p.6).

Aronson’s (1994) description of thematic analysis is summarized below. According to her process, after collecting data, researchers form thematic analyses by listing patterns of experiences from transcribed conversations through paraphrasing core ideas and using direct quotes from participants. In the next step, researchers “identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns” and then related patterns are combined under sub-themes. The aim of theme formation is to get a comprehensive picture of participants’ collective experiences based on their stories. As the last step, Aronson suggests that the researcher should establish a valid argument on these themes by referring to the related literature to form the stories. In conclusion, she maintains that “a developed story line helps the reader to comprehend the process, understanding, and motivation of the interviewer.” (para. 9).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Stories Told

This chapter depicts each participant's story. Telling stories of individuals is "the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.415). Case studies of individuals are tools for researchers to understand the experiences of others. In other words, it is not the individuals that I am interested in; it is their experiences and the process involved in these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, participants generously shared their experiences of before and after student teaching. Because I agree with Stake, (1994) who contended, "the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing, anyone's telling" (p.240), I only tell some of the participants' stories. However, to gain a profound understanding of these beginning teachers' experiences, broad excerpts from individual interviews were chosen and are presented in the following sequence:

- the process of their decision in becoming a teacher,
- their experiences in the program,
- their current teaching assignment, and
- their experience as first year teachers.

**Table 3****Overview of participants' characteristics**

Participant	Ethnic, and cultural background	Age (at the time of interviews)	Student teaching placements	Currently teaching grade and school
Belle	Hispanic, bilingual in English/Spanish, middle class	41	11 weeks of kindergarten 4 weeks of preschool	Title-I school. Kindergarten as her 2 <sup>nd</sup> year, different than 1 <sup>st</sup> year, 1 <sup>st</sup> grade
Olive	Caucasian, middle class, monolingual	25	16 weeks of Kindergarten in Costa Rica 9 weeks of preschool in AZ	Title-I school. 1 <sup>st</sup> grade in her 2 <sup>nd</sup> year, different than first year teaching grade (Kindergarten) and school
Libby	Caucasian, middle class, monolingual	25	11 weeks of kindergarten 4 weeks of special ed. preschool	Title-I school Kindergarten in her 3 <sup>rd</sup> year, the same grade the same school as her 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> year
Sofia	American-Indian/28 Caucasian, middle class, monolingual		11 weeks of kindergarten 4 weeks of preschool	Title-I school, different than her previous school, charter. Preschool as her 3 <sup>rd</sup> year
Kayla	Caucasian, middle class, monolingual	25	12 weeks of 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade 4 weeks of preschool	Title-I school. 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade in her 2 <sup>nd</sup> year, the same as her 1 <sup>st</sup> year

## **Belle**

Belle did not pursue a college degree right after high school graduation, but got married instead. Having two children, she was a stay home mom until she decided to return college to get her degree in education. Even though she did not go to college right after high school, she always knew that she wanted to major in education. She remembers playing “school” when she was a little girl. Even though her siblings and children in the neighborhood did not enjoy going to school, she always did. As she was always fond of school, one person had a great impact on her decision to enter education.

I think my second grade teacher, and I saw her later in life after I graduated college, I think I saw her. And I told her that she inspired me to do so. Ms....., my second grade teacher. And I was very quiet, and didn't .... I always kept it to myself and did my work by myself. In her classroom, she brought humor into education. She was just, she was so fun, made everything fun and funny. So I looked forward to going into her class everyday, just wondering what she was going to do that day, would do. I think she really inspired me.

I saw her later on in life and she lives in my parents' neighborhood. My mom sees her when she is out walking or. But when I saw her, I saw her and just cried. And I told her the story and she said: 'Oh my goodness, I didn't realize that.' But it was awesome seeing her, and being able to tell her. She inspired me, to go into education.

Proudly expressing that she is the first college graduate in her family, Belle got her degree when she was in her late 30's. Being a mom and older than most undergraduate students, she had a different

experience than most of her classmates in the program. Even most of her instructors were younger than her, as she recalls. Unlike other college students, she had a house and two children to take care of in addition to her responsibilities as a student. With laughs, she states:

It was funny, when I came I was the oldest and they called me 'mom'... It was a very different experience, coming into class, coming back at a later age you just appreciate it. You appreciate it, and you work for it, and you want it. It is just funny seeing kids coming straight from high school or younger kids. It'd make me laugh when I went to class and 'oh.. I have these papers to write, oh.. I have to do this' and I would think and laugh 'try going home to do laundry, cook, dinner, clean, wash the dishes, make sure that the children's homework is done, and then write a paper on top of that, or write out bills' it was just responsibility.. It was so funny I'd hear the complaints. 'Writing paper is nothing'. Try to pay a mortgage.

Being a mom and also working as a volunteer parent in her children's classrooms, Belle believes that she started the program with experience and knowledge about child development and education.

Taking core classes such as ECD 200 and 300 level courses, she felt that there was a repetition regarding the content that was presented, "It didn't seem that the information has changed. So that was kind of frustrating because it seemed like a little bit of waste of time for me."

Regarding courses offered in the program, Belle felt that more in-classroom related courses could have been offered to prepare teacher candidates for the profession.



As Belle talked about her experience as a student teacher in her K–3<sup>rd</sup> grade placement, she expressed how she gradually took over the classroom.

In the beginning, I'd observe, got the routines done, I learned their names, they got to know me. But everything that she [the teacher] did I was just right next to her, and she would explain things 'what she did? how she did?'. Just following her, taking notes every single thing that she did. I guess I observed. I cannot remember how many weeks I observed her. And then she would just integrate me in, and she would say 'Do you wanna do this right now?' or 'Do you wanna just...' Then I would take on a lesson. And then we would talk about it after. She would tell me 'you know if you do this it would help this way.' So I would do a map lesson, then I would do a reading lesson, and then I would do morning and she would do the afternoon. I would do the afternoon and she would do the morning. And then pretty soon I would do the whole day. She would just kind of sit back, and then she started leaving the classroom. And it was up to me to get them to their specials. It was up to me, it was my class where she would just let me, she relinquished that power over to me. As I said being in another teacher's classroom is a hard thing to do. And you know she does that. And she does it awesome. But the way she does it, you know, it is just complete observation. Just following her around like a puppy, every single she does. And then she just let me. But it was always 'Do you feel comfortable doing this? Do you think it is OK?' And in the beginning taking small groups, you know. In the beginning it was simple 'Do you wanna give them ... right now?' It is just a process she goes through. And it works awesome. Because I did. I never felt like I was stamping on her toes. I never felt that I was alone, and I never felt that I was going to be criticized for something I did. Because she had the process she went through. It really helped me. It was an awesome process.

Her preschool placement, however, was not as beneficial as her K–3<sup>rd</sup> grade placement. As she explains the reasons, the biggest reason was the amount and time required for that placement.

Because that was such a disruption. I was there first for 12 weeks and then for 3 weeks and only for 3 days each week. I never really got the chance to really get to know these students or know the teacher all that well. So it was like an interruption, that second half. I think if you, as I said, I knew that I did not want preschool. So I think that if you are aware what grade you want to teach. I knew for a fact that I was not going into preschool. I wish I could have stayed there and maybe experienced an upper grade. I wish I could have, maybe done those 3 weeks in another grade. That would have been helpful. I just think that if you know that you are not going to, why not offer a selection maybe. I think that would be helpful.

Belle was teaching kindergarten students in a Title I school at the time of interviews. Even though she was in the same school as the previous year, her grade level and demographics of the classroom were much different. However, she felt much more confident compared to the previous year's experience.

I think it has gotten easier this year because I am more comfortable in kindergarten and I knew that I have more support. I think I have a little bit more confidence in myself, you know. I went in this year thinking that 'Ok. I do feel pretty good about this.' I can be left alone and not get scared. But I don't know how much of this helps, because I am a mom, because I have my own children, you know. So a lot goes back to just 'Would I allow my own children to do?' I guess maybe it gets easier, and easier as I go on. Because it wasn't as difficult as. I remember my first year of last year, I was scared, shaking, and nervous, and thinking, 'What if they cry, what if...' You know, this year I am like 'You'll be fine, we are gonna have fun.' It has gotten easier and it is just my confidence, you know.

Her students are mostly coming from Hispanic background bringing some challenges along with it. Belle herself comes from a Hispanic

background, which vastly helped in her communication with parents and understanding children from a cultural view.

I could identify with them you know why. I guess them being Hispanic, me being Hispanic, I knew where they were coming from, or they would say words to me in Spanish, or something like that. I kind of identified with them, they did with me as well. Different little stories that they had, thinking back to my childhood, it was as though I had a kind of kinship with them.

After starting in the program at ASU, Belle was awarded a scholarship that required her to work for at least 3 years in schools in low socioeconomic areas. Her student teaching placement was also arranged through that scholarship and she was placed with a teacher who was also part of this scholarship program.

Belle's first year of teaching was in her student teaching placement school. That was very helpful because she knew the school, teachers, environment, and some of the students.

And then in my first year of teaching, it helped because I did my student teaching at that school. And I did a first grade class. I had a lot of my students from my kindergarten. So they knew me. That was so helpful to me. I knew their learning styles, I knew their names, I knew who I could count on, who could help me with other kids, you know? So that was very comforting to me. I saw friendly faces, you know? Just being tossed into a classroom, not knowing anyone—I don't know, that would have been very difficult, I think. It being my first year in my classroom.

As one of the common struggles among beginning teachers, Belle also had difficulty in catching up with her teaching schedule in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching.

People just look at teachers as ‘you get there when they get there, and you leave when they go home.’ Yeah. My husband was like ‘why are you staying there until 5 o’clock?’ Last year was horrible. Even the janitor come in and would say ‘are you still here?’, because I couldn’t catch up.

Perhaps being a mom and having responsibilities at her home along with her teaching responsibilities, she found it difficult to have enough time to be prepared for her classroom.

## **Olive**

Olive’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher made learning enjoyable for Olive. She is one of the teachers who influenced her decision to become a teacher. However, it was not just her teachers who inspired her but also something that she liked about it since her childhood. She remembers playing “teacher” and “school” as a young girl. One of the other reasons Olive decided to become a teacher is that she is very comfortable working with children, specifically those below 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

And then, my third grade teacher, the way she taught was so amazing to me. I loved school everyday and I loved learning. Then, I was like, I wanted to be a teacher like her. That is kind of how it started. I thought about other things, like I wanted to be chef or photographer. But I kept coming back to being a teacher. And then in high school, I took a teacher preparation course where I got an intern in a classroom. Then, I was like:

‘that is it, like I am totally doing this.’ I like younger kids. I went to an EC program instead of the regular one.

Even though, overall she had a positive attitude toward the EC program, she felt very negative toward one instructor in particular:

There is one teacher I didn’t like. I still don’t like her. Because, she taught the reading class, how we were supposed to teach reading. I felt like a horrible failure everyday when I tried to teach reading, because, she did not teach us how to teach it. She taught us like philosophy behind teaching program, like teaching reading and stuff. And then didn’t teach us how to teach any of that stuff.

Her frustration and anger with one instructor might be due to her frustration of teaching reading to young children. If she felt that she had enough resources that she could use in the classroom, she would not have felt that way. Additionally, she talked about another class that was equally disturbing to her. It was an assessment class which, as I perceived, mainly consisted of methodological content. The reason for another course that she was not happy with was the teaching method of the instructor. She put it this way:

He didn’t start doing that whole, like teach us how to do stuff. He’d do lots of lecturing in the beginning, and I don’t remember any of the stuff. But then, I was like ‘I wish this was more hands-on’. And then he realized that there was a better way, so he started to do that, too. It was fine.

In her first student teaching placement, Olive was in a special education preschool. Even though she thinks that the teacher was not very fond of Olive, because of her tardiness and ‘unprofessional’

behavior, she was quite impressed with the teacher and the classroom. Like many people who believe that preschool teaching is “babysitting,” Olive’s view toward preschool was just that. However, she admits that this changed after her experience in the preschool setting.

I was actually super mad, when I learned we were gonna do preschool. I was like ‘I don’t wanna waste my time on preschool, because it is babysitting, I don’t wanna do it’. I was like really irritated. But, somebody else interviewed me about that, and they interviewed me before the program, and I was like ‘I hate this, I don’t wanna do it’. And after, I was like ‘It was amazing, I was so happy’. I loved it. I think it taught me a lot. And I think even if you don’t end up teaching in preschool, knowing where kids come from, it helps you. You know what they should have learned, like fine motor skills, they should have learned it in the preschool’. If they didn’t, that is because they didn’t learn in preschool.

Because she was so impressed by this experience, she decided to do her master’s degree in special education.

Olive’s second student teaching placement was in a kindergarten in Costa Rica. Her mentor teacher was a Costa Rican citizen and spoke English fluently. Even though the kindergarten was in Costa Rica, it was taught in English, and it had an American curriculum. Her experiences in this school and country were quite positive. She discussed how great her mentor teacher was and how great the country was. She was there for 16 weeks, which covered one whole semester.

My mentor teacher is a kindergarten teacher, which I never wanted to teach until I actually did. My mentor teacher was amazing. She has been teaching for 15 years. I don't know. She was actually native, so English was her second language. She spoke with fluency. She'd really never have a problem. Which some people did. Some of those teachers did have problems. They couldn't communicate very well. Because they taught completely in English. They never taught in Spanish. It was a complete immersion school. It was an American school. It was like American curriculum, and everything. And my teacher was amazing, and she was so good at providing positive criticism, like, to better you and she was so, she was like kind of calm person, and she never really got upset with anything which was awesome.

That demeanor was with her all the time. So she would be like, she was so open like 'Do you meet to talk about that, talk about this?' And then giving me ideas while in charge, you could do this. Or like if I'd give her ideas, she'd totally use them. Like I'd looked up a couple different math activities. And I started going backwards, how much I was taking the classroom, she was like using the activities that I brought. She was totally open to new ideas. But then also, was like, using her past experiences and like I was... I never messed up student teaching there.

Olive's view of "preparedness" by the program was different in her first year than in her second year of teaching. While she did not feel prepared in her first year, she later realized that there were other factors involved in why she felt "unprepared." As she explains in her words:

When I first step foot into the classroom, I felt like I was not prepared at all. And I didn't know what to do. But now, being in my second year, and I realize it was because 90% is that you have never been in charge of a classroom before, and so you just like over think things. But now I think it prepared me probably. I'd say like on a scale of 1-10, like 7 and then the rest you just kind of have to learn, and figure it out while you are there.

Because every school district is different and we have too many reading programs. Then you just learn how to manage kids, which is an everyday struggle for me. I think it is for a lot of teachers, though. Classrooms are like the hardest part. Because, kids, like they'll do stuff you never expected. You will like 'what is happening.'

"Brutal" was the word that Olive chose to describe her first year of teaching in her kindergarten classroom. As many beginning teachers, Olive was challenged by the expectations that she should handle a classroom with the same manner and success as an experienced teacher does. Proving that she was a successful beginning teacher puts a great deal of pressure on Olive.

That was brutal. The hardest thing ever I have ever had. Like I said before, you can have the best preparation in the world, but until you are there and doing it, you don't know what to do. And so, I think I kind of had a good first year overall. It was hard, horrible, and I wanted to quit a lot, but I think you just kind of learn that you are expected to be able to do it right away. You have been doing/learning about teaching for so long at that point that you are expected to walk in and to be a teacher. But there is so much more on the job training than that.

The school Olive taught at her first year had a different, much more structured curriculum. Being a first year teacher, she did not how to incorporate her ideas and knowledge into curriculum more rigid learning environment than she trained for.

One of main difficulties was that my program was very constructivist. Reading and math programs were so structured in the school district I went to. I didn't really know how to merge my ideas of constructivism with the fact that I have to use these programs when I was teaching. That was kind of



difficult. And classroom management was the hardest thing because I had crazy children. And I didn't know what to do. Because I had those ideas that you think you will do, but there it is totally different.

## **Libby**

Libby followed her mom's footsteps when it came time to choose a career. Not only did she follow her footsteps, she also gained various experiences by visiting her mom's classrooms before attending the program.

Well, my mom taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade, so when I was in high school I spent a lot of time, because my school ended before hers. So, I'd often go to her school after my school ended. Like before I could drive, I could take the bus there. Later, a lot of times I'd drive there. I think it just seemed her role model inspired me more than like a teacher I actually had.

When she was talking about the instructors at ASU, she was satisfied with most of them. Naturally, she believes that she benefited more from some than others. For example, the instructor of a class about science education did not satisfy Libby as a student and as a teacher.

The science, I wouldn't say that the teacher that I had at the time was the strongest teacher, she was like a grad assistant. And I have nothing against grad assistants, but I think it was just a last minute, put her in there for the job. I think she was kind of overwhelmed and didn't really understand what she was supposed to be teaching. And so I think that it was kind of a struggle for her, she was trying her best, she was but I don't use that portfolio very often.

With her mom's help she found her student teaching placement for K-3<sup>rd</sup>. It was a kindergarten classroom and Libby's experience was quite

encouraging before entering the profession. She was happy with her choice of mentor whom she described as “the perfect person for me to be with, because we had very similar teaching philosophies.” Her mentor teacher gave Libby responsibilities gradually which was very helpful for her to take over the job.

The first week of it I was observing, kind of, you know how she did different things, and I observed how their day worked. Then she kind of let me do a little, because she did centers, so one of the centers I think I, you know, played games with them and just got to know the kids. And then I just tried to interact with kids as much as I could. I observed her routines as much as I could. And I started early, so I ended up, because I student taught spring semester. So I just went back right when they started school. I didn't wait until the ASU semester started. Because I just kind of wanted to. I don't know, I was really excited about it. So I just wanted to be in there as much as could. But probably by the second week, she started having me do circle time.

We would every week sit and plan everything out. And she would let me put in ideas. but a lot of things she had already done years past. And she would just kind of explain what they did. She kind of just walked me through the components. So, I started doing circle time, and then you know maybe the next week I did circle time and math. I think the last thing I was responsible for teaching was writing.

There was a teacher in another grade that was having trouble with her son. He was sick, and she was having the days off. So my teacher would go in there and watch her class while I was watching ours. She kind of gave me a lot of freedom. She started leaving would let me do a lot of teaching. I was really doing most of the teaching by the end. And then I kind of backed up like the last week.

But, she really allowed me to do a lot with the kids. And I don't know if it is because she knew me before. I mean we didn't

really know each other well, but I think she knew that I had so much experience with my mom's room that she, maybe she just figured that I'd be OK. I don't really know, but we definitely planned together and prepared a lot of things together. She was just really a good mentor. She's actually retired. So nobody could have her any more.

Libby's preschool student teaching placement was in a special education classroom. As she benefited vastly from her kindergarten placement in terms of practice, it was not the same account in her preschool placement. She was positive in gaining some experience; however she barely remembers having any kind of teaching practice in class. She was given a role of an observer or aide rather than a student teacher:

And I can't remember if I ever, I am not sure if I ever really taught, a circle lesson. I did help at the centers a lot, though. I helped to do different art activities, or I just helped like play with the kids. I'd get down on the floor, because a lot of them didn't play with other people. So I would kind of try to interact with them in that way. And then I got to sit in on a couple IEP meetings. It was actually, it was when they were transitioning to kindergarten. Some of the kids were just going to a regular kindergarten and some of them. So I got to go, because I think I went on Weds and they didn't have kids. And so on those days we would take parents on tours of programs and things like that. So that was really, I think, beneficial for me to see just the different options that I really didn't know about.

The teacher saw me as an intern or helper. I'd do a lot of preparation, because I'd get there early and you have time in the middle. So I'd definitely did a lot of prep work for her, get things ready. We didn't really always plan together. She would kind of tell me what she was doing next. And sometimes she would say 'Do you have any ideas?' But I just, I didn't feel, it wasn't the same interaction that I had before. So I'd say I was more

reserved to like give ideas and things like that. So I also kind of played that role as more of like a helper. And I tried to interact with the kids as much as I could to just learn from them. Because a lot of them had such different needs that I had experienced. But was definitely more of a helper than anything.

Libby was a third-year teacher at the time of interviews. The school that she student taught hired her just before her graduation and she has been teaching there since then. Demographically, her school and classroom were mostly Caucasian and middle class children.

She taught a kindergarten class, as she did for her student teaching. Teaching the same grade level and having a student teaching mentor in the same school was very helpful in her first year of teaching. She found herself getting help from her former mentor when she needed it.

Well, I'd say in my first year, the placement in the kindergarten, was really similar, because I ended up getting a job at the same school. We kind of kept going. We planned together the same as we did when I was student teaching. And we just really worked closely together, especially me and my mentor teacher. Probably the only difference is you are by yourself. I mean if something happens, you are not sure what to do about it. You are the one that has to make that decision.

Personality wise, Libby was very cautious to get prepared and plan well ahead. That was also a very effective quality in surviving the first years of teaching a career. As all teachers — ignoring the amount of experience— Libby had some difficulties and challenges regarding

some students in her classroom. She expressed some challenges she faced in her 1<sup>st</sup> year as follows:

My first year went pretty well. I mean, I had, how many, 20 kids? It was kindergarten where I student taught, so that really helped, because I kind of knew what to expect. I knew the beginning of the year would be a lot different than the end, when I was student teaching. But, I kind of knew the age, and knew sort of what they are learning and things like that. And I feel like I was just really excited to finally have my own room. I got to set it up and to do things that I wanted to them. And sort of, it was probably more exciting than everything else. I was a little bit nervous, but I just kind of made sure to be well prepared and plan the things the best way that I could. So I hopefully just avoided problems happening. And I'd say it went pretty well.

I had a couple students that I struggled with. I had one, I was telling you about that ended up going into self-contained classroom for behavior problems. And she actually went for 1<sup>st</sup> grade, so she was probably my biggest challenge, just because I had never really experienced someone like this. And she was, she could be dangerous for herself and other kids, so I had to learn ways, either remove her or everybody else from some of the situations that would happen. She was kind of unpredictable, so you just, I mean it was really hard. We would try to avoid possible blow ups as much as we could, but sometimes we just couldn't predict when it was going to happen. And that was my biggest challenge; just what to do when certain things happen. And my principal at the time, he still is, but that was his 1<sup>st</sup> year as principal and his 1<sup>st</sup> year as working in an elementary school. So he didn't really know how to handle some of these situations. So it was kind of difficult. So I wasn't really getting a lot of support from him, and I was really relying on the other teachers. There was a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher that I was partnered up with. And she would sort of be not the time out

room, but she would be in the room if we ever had to remove her from my room to get out the situation, that is where she would go. And she was really helpful and we have a psychologist and social worker that really helped a lot with her. That was really my biggest struggle.

## **Sofia**

Her childhood experiences were influential in Sofia's decision in becoming a teacher. Her mom is a teacher with a Ph.D. degree.

However, she feels that it was not her mom who influenced her decision. Her mom owned an early childhood center where she spent a great deal of time while she was very young herself and later when she was an older child. Therefore she was always surrounded by young children.

Besides growing up in an early childhood setting and being the middle child of 5, she had to take care of her younger siblings during her childhood. Her youngest brother who is 10 years younger than her was a big responsibility for her. She would take care of him when her mom was busy with other children and the school she owned. Later, she took even a bigger responsibility. When Sofia was 14, when she was in high school, her older sister got pregnant at a very young age. That is when Sofia found herself, primarily, taking care of her nephew for the following 5 years. Therefore, having a huge part in taking care

of her brother and nephew was the biggest impact on her decision to become an early childhood teacher.

And my mom was always gone, always with other children, doing centers.... I'd kind of say they kind of let me raise them. Especially my older sister, with my nephew, she just kind of checked out for five years and until I went up to college she really didn't take back over her son. He was mine. I took him to the daycare. I also took my little brother, as well, who just graduated from high school. It was more of just an essence of who I am. They kind of made me who I am.

On the other hand, her decision to enter the teaching profession did not happen in her younger years. The first time she went to college, she was in a different major than education. Because of financial reasons, she could not afford to finish that degree and quit. After going back to home, she realized that education was her calling and she returned to ASU as an education major. The reasons she did not want to become a teacher in the first place was, ironically, her mother.

The reason I didn't want to do it is because I didn't want to become like my mom. I didn't want to be who my mom is with her children. I didn't want to be a teacher just because she is a teacher. It was really kind of more of a defining state of older age, to be like her. I guess for me it was just kind of a, I always knew what I should be doing. I was trying not to equate who I am with my mother, because she is one.

Coming to the program with experience of being around young children and being older than most of her classmates, she had a different view toward the program compared to her classmates. Sofia felt that she was more realistic than her counterparts.

I am quite older than them by about 4-5 years. Which in your 20s, it is a lot. You know they are 21 years old, and you are like 'how much experience you had?' and they are like 'I nannied'. Well, that is different than running the classroom with 25 5-year olds. Good luck with that.

Her feelings regarding other students not being realistic was not only limited to her courses but also some of her course instructors. While she was very fond of some course instructors, she disliked some others.

She taught me phonics and it is my passion now. I love it. I love teaching children how to read. I love letters, I love sounds. I love word family and foundations of watching their eyes pop when they figure out a new word. It is just because of her, because of how she taught me to teach them. But then like I said, you like classroom management or the SEI classes. I thought 'are you kidding me, why are we here?' They were standing up front with a projector and lecturing us about. I mean it wasn't real. So I was again, yes, it depends on the teacher. The good teachers that I had in the program, I learned a lot. I don't think that there were enough of them.

While she was talking ECD courses, she expressed that she was not happy with them either. As she told her experience about these classes, she often expressed her unhappiness about them:

I just paid no attention, whatsoever. It was find books for early childhood. They went over 0 to 1 year in three weeks. I mean it was pretty boring. It didn't really pertain to a lot of aspects of teaching such as how do you teach a 6 months old? Now that I have a 3 year old, 1 year old. I do know how to engage them, and show them different things. No it wasn't like. It was literally 'here is the book, here how a 6 months old look like. They will be crawling, they might be..' You know that kind of stuff, instead of 'how would you, if you had 1 year-old classroom, what kind of project would you do to help them to increase their fine-motor skills, increase their gross-motor skills?' It wasn't. That would be a good ECD class. Find books for ages 3-4 you know, I



remember this project, seriously I had to find 15 books for the kids 3-4, and I had to write summary out of each of them. And I had the test every three months about the information that was presented on an overhead. And like I said I won't do well on tests. So I was just kind of 'Zoned out'. And yes that was how my early childhood class were. And I think 'the infants and toddlers' too. It was the same way, just use overhead, here is the book information, find the toys. That was what they got us to do. Find the toys that they could play with. And write a summary about it, and turn it in.

Sofia's student teaching placements were 11 weeks in kindergarten and 5 weeks in preschool. For her kindergarten placement, she taught 9 weeks. One week after getting acquainted with the children and classroom routine, Sofia was given the whole responsibility of classroom teaching.

So she would sit in the back and let me know 'delta, plus delta,' tell me what I did well, what I should work on, and she was very supportive. But hands off, you know? She didn't try to make me her, she just tried to help make me a better teacher for me. It was really actually interesting. I was so pregnant. I came in the 1<sup>st</sup> week and was just getting to know her. By the next week I am taking over lessons. We just took one week to gradually meet, and the week after that I was teaching the class. So it was .... She would just leave sometimes, too and be gone in other classes, observing and around the school. It was a really good learning experience for me.

Preschool student teaching placement, however, was different but beneficial as well. Teaching style and philosophy of her mentor teacher in this placement was quite different than Sofia's. Although Sofia will never have the same philosophy as her mentor does, she was impressed by his philosophy and values it.

He taught me a lot of things that I want to do. He was a very great teacher. I like the way he would manage the classroom, I mean literally I was feeling that I was sitting in the middle of the chaos. I really felt like I couldn't handle that. But for him it worked. All of these teachers have different styles and different things that work for us. If it works with the kids, if the kids are learning, and if the kids are happy, then let it be. I mean his kids learned a lot, and they were happy.

I taught in the same school for the next two years, so I got some of his kids. So they were definitely, their social skills and life lessons they didn't have. Because, he didn't teach them, I'd say societal rules of you know not showing each other your underwear, and speaking kindly, and not being disrespectful, and using your manners. For him those weren't necessary. His main objective was 'nobody is hurt, nobody is running, are you learning.' Those were pretty much the basics. So I mean I still even talk to him, and I still think that he is a great teacher for his classroom and what he does. But would I do it? But definitely taught me that teachers have different styles and if it works for them then, who am I to say that it is wrong?

Like any other student in the same position, she had a supervisor from ASU during her student teaching. Even though her supervisor was from the educational field, she was not from early childhood education. Naturally her knowledge and experience was very limited about ECE. Consequently, Sofia felt little or no benefit from her.

Monitored me I'd say. She came in and watched a couple lessons, and then me, my mentor teacher, and her would sit down and discuss it. So this was a part of how I was evaluated, through her and through my mentor teacher, too. Pass through the program.

Sofia's current teaching place is a Title I school. Teaching in Title I schools was always her preference.

Sofia's job searching process was short because she was offered a job in one of the schools that she student taught. Having a newborn and being offered a job at a school that had a child care center, she accepted the job. The first year of her job experience was both a learning experience and a challenge for her. Dealing with parents and lack of administrative support were the most challenging parts rather than teaching in the classroom.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> year, I was with children the whole time and it was wonderful. Obviously it was a learning experience. As I said last time, managing the class was the hardest thing. But for me, the most difficult think about being a teacher is the parents and the administration. Because I just really feel like they don't support teachers.. Parents come in and sit in the back of the room write their letters about what you are doing wrong, about the books to be read, and how they handle their one child at home, and how you are supposed to manage 25 children the same way. And you know you are just thinking 'Hmmm, ...' and you are just supposed to suck it up and just keep apologizing and letting all those adults walk all over you. So for me it was just kind of how to toughen up, my skin, you know

Because being an early childhood teacher, I kind of still equate myself to being young, that is why I work with young children. But dealing with their parents is a whole different ball game. And then if you go to your administration, at least in my experience, you can't get support, which is the reason I left the charter school because after I went to my administration about my concerns, they kind of got pushed back on to me instead of standing up for me as the teacher. I mean I have never had a bad assessment or bad review in my classroom. It has always been 'lets sit down with that parent and discuss their concerns about what needs to be happen in your classroom.' So that is what I think for me was a learning experience. Like I said, I never had issues with children. I have never had a child say that

she doesn't don't want to be in my class. It has never been the kids. I always have a great time in the classroom.

## **Kayla**

When I asked about her decision to become a teacher, she answered that either she was going to be a veterinarian or a teacher, with some degree of sarcasm. She explains that teaching was not ever her passion while growing up, and it was not until she was forced to decide on her major, after her first year in college as “undecided.” Seeing other teachers on the job, and spending some time with children in the classroom environment, she decided that “this is what I want to do”.

I think it was just me, me confronting myself. I think it probably cemented in ‘this is the right thing to do’, when I would go to classes. I was interested in the conversations, or because it was easy. I mean this is the stuff that makes sense to me; I can pick up on it. And when I started, maybe not in the first internship because I didn't like my first internship, but it was more or less like getting around kids and seeing how I interacted in the classroom. I really liked it. Even if I didn't like my internships, I always bonded with kids and learned something anyway. So there wasn't really one person who told me this is what I should do.

When talking about her experience in the program, she expressed that she thinks that the program does not portray a realistic picture of teaching. She compares her experiences from a student's and from a teacher's point of view.

I imagine an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg is what you can actually see, and it is like your lesson planning and teaching. Teaching, because teaching is teaching, You are making kids learn things. And then the iceberg the below water is 12 times bigger than that. I think you have to be prepared for the fact that it is time consuming, hard, and you have to really check yourself to see if this is really that you want to do. This is kind of like a sink or swim thing. This is the truth of the teaching. Teaching is hard. It is hard finding a need to set yourself down to figure out if you are really going to do this or not. It kind of looks like a gut-check.

From her point of view, the program only shows “the tip of the iceberg.”

When beginning teachers enter the profession, they realize that there is more than a couple lesson plans to do. It is also very interesting to hear from her that maybe this is a way to eliminate teachers who do not have the strength or capability to deal with the challenges in their first years of teaching.

In terms of preparedness by the program, Kayla was felt prepared in some areas, but she felt that the program should have done more in other areas to prepare students for their first year of teaching.

In some ways I felt really prepared. Like I am ready to leave college, and just go out and try this out on my own. But in other ways, I didn't feel prepared. I think, especially when I was in the program, there wasn't enough emphasis on teaching reading. I think I took one class, and it was even mixed with another class, the same time, it was like you learn reading and you learn something else in this class. It was like science and reading class together, in one. And what makes it hard when you go out into work force is that the reading is huge. It is the basis of your day.

I mean reading is in everything. If you don't know how to effectively teach reading, then, when you are in an interview, you look like an idiot who cannot even answer the questions. So I studied about all this reading and stuff, to even know what I was talking about when I am in interviews. And it wasn't until I started teaching that I felt as if 'Oh my gosh, I don't feel like I have learned any of this in college.' They did not prepare me for this at all. And that is partly the reason that when I started my masters, I am doing language and literacy.

I realized throughout interviews that even though Kayla teaches in a Title-I school, her student teaching placement was in a quite different setting. Even the other participants were impressed when they learned during the focus group interview where she did her student teaching. Not being familiar with that school, I got the impression that it was a high-end, desirable and well-known school among teachers and parents. Kayla explained that she was really determined to teach there with a teacher who was also, at the time, teaching courses at ASU. She was proud and laughed when she was telling me that she was interviewed by the principal of the school to be accepted for student teaching.

He was a male teacher, first of all, so it was a different dynamic, I mean between a male and female. And it was good because there was no relationship other than just getting along. You know, such as 'What did you do this weekend?' It was just strict student teaching talking. There was no relationship built. So it was very straightforward with him. And he was good because he would sit down and take a lot of notes of like everything I did.

So although other teachers may not pay attention or may not bring it up to you, he would bring up every little detail about everything that was going on in the classroom. Some people might find that overwhelming, but it was easy because I felt that 'Oh, I didn't know I was doing that.' And then I'd fix it and he wouldn't write down anymore. So he always gave me a lot of information to help me. He was also very trusting in me, because he'd leave the room. His philosophy was 'sink or swim.' You can do this or you can't do this. And if you can't do this, you shouldn't be a teacher. So he'd leave the room and go work on the stuff, and I liked that freedom. He trusted me enough that he could walk away, and he knew whatever was going to happen, I am in the room and I am going to take care of it.

He was a great teacher. A lot of his teaching style, I have kept. Because I liked it, it was successful, and it fits with my personality. It fits with his personality. It worked for me and a lot of what I am took away is all because of him. I let him know that too: 'Oh my god, I don't how I'd be able to do this, if it weren't for you.', because he was really, really beneficial.

Of course, later she realizes that doing student teaching in such a high-end school might bring some difficulties with it while applying for jobs at Title-I schools. Since the population and working environment of her student teaching placement was much different than Title-I schools, people were not willing to hire her. The implication was that she could not handle working in a Title-I school since her main teaching experience was in such a dissimilar setting.

Eventually, however, Kayla was hired and is now in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students at a Title I school. I am quite impressed with her determination from the beginning to teach 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Her student teaching experience was in a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class, and she managed

to get hired for the same grade in her first year. Even though she was certified to teach up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, due to her previous substitute teaching experience she is not willing to teach upper grades. She feels that 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is the perfect grade for her to teach, and believes that every teacher is meant to teach a specific grade. However, referring to current circumstances of the economy, she will teach any grade, if she has to, to stay in the profession. Besides, this was the main reason that she received elementary certification along with her early childhood endorsement.

Her current classroom is culturally mixed, although the majority is Caucasian. Even though the demographics of her current classroom do not differ vastly from last year's classroom, she realizes that it is different in some other ways such as girls' versus boys' behaviors.

Last year I had a ton of boys. I think I had 17–18 boys, and 10 girls. That made a huge difference. It was harder. But for the last two years, that is what I have seen, that is what I've dealt with. I also last year had 4–5 kids that had previously been retained. So they were technically supposed to be 4<sup>th</sup> graders. So their maturity level was way different.

Being as young as I am, the girls really look up to me. Of course I am their teacher, and I am an authoritarian like figure, or other figure for some of them. But I think they find me more hip, cooler. They relate to me and they want to get along with me more. And they do things to please me, they don't ever want to do things to not please me. So they always constantly have that filter in their head, like making the right decision, and more or less thinking through in the big picture.



After having some experience as a substitute teacher, Kayla was hired as a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, which was a perfect grade and position to start her career because this grade was her first choice to teach. As Kayla was challenged by some of the difficulties in her first year, her teammates—other teachers who were teaching the same grade as she did—were the main support in her survival in teaching.

What happened in my first year teaching? Huh. What didn't happen in my first year teaching? Like I said, I got hired at a school that was actually not looking to hire a 1<sup>st</sup> year teacher because of the route that they were going. , the IB program, and it'd be a lot to take on, and it was. Luckily, my first year teaching, I got hired on the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade team. And the two members of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher were awesome. One had just got hired on that year too, but she had 9 years of teaching experience. The other one was a veteran teacher. It was her 2<sup>nd</sup> year in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and only her 2<sup>nd</sup> year on that school. So we were relatively new to the school. But we had varying levels of teaching experience we have gotten along amazing.

I don't know how I would have gotten through my first year of teaching to be honest, because they were a huge support system for me. I was always confident in myself, and always I thought I'd be a good teacher. I didn't turn it in for every little thing, but it was nice to have them there, especially because we had to plan the curriculum anyway. And sometimes that would mean working on weekends. It made it fun. They were really good friends. So that was really great. And also that year, there was a new principal that was in his first year at that school too. There was a lot that was new. Even not just for me, for everyone at that school. You know, new curriculum, new principal, a bunch of staff members? So everybody was kind of feeling the waters out my first year of teaching.

Teaming up or having a mentor was an effective method in helping novice teachers to stay in the teaching. However, it should not be

ignored that—in Kayla’s situation—she was very persistent and willing to stay in the profession. She made sure that she was well prepared before entering the classroom.

Well, [as a beginning teacher] you spend time as much as you want to. No one says that you have stay here, and you have to do that. But for me, if you spend the time planning your week and getting the material ready, you have everything ready to go before the day even starts. You will have less to worry about while teaching children during the day. I don’t need to go do copying, because it is done. I don’t need to put together a game, because it is done. So you cut out a lot of discipline problems and classroom management problems if you prepare ahead of the time. You know if you don’t lesson plan, and don’t do those things then, yeah, it is gonna be hard, and you are gonna be confused. So it is just finding the balance if you have a hard work week.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Voices and Reflections

In the previous chapter, the participants and some of the experiences they shared during the interviews were introduced. Though each individual's story and experiences were unique, the data collected through this study revealed similar patterns that need to be examined and analyzed collectively (Aranson, 1994; Riessman, 2008). Presenting experiences without any interpretation and analysis does not benefit anyone. For example, interpretation enables researchers to put multiple meanings on the experiences, through which they are transformed (Denzin, 1994). I categorized the patterns I observed under the following themes to be able to portray a clear picture.

1. Experiences in the program
  - Experiences with coursework
  - Internship
  - Student teaching
  - The role of mentors during student teaching
2. First year of teaching experience
  - Realities: management, resources, parental pressure
  - Induction program
  - Are beginning teachers given more challenging classes?
3. Second year of teaching

4. Support from family and friends
5. Program preparation
6. Have you ever thought about giving up teaching?

### **Experiences in the Program**

**Experiences about coursework.** One issue that was stated by participants was the repetition of content, especially in some early childhood education and development classes. (Meullar, Wisneski, & File, 2010). Individuals who enter the teacher education program are not tested in any way for their detailed knowledge or screened in any manner for prior experience. Accordingly, everyone matriculates through the same sequence in the program. If some are more knowledgeable in one area, such as child development, they might feel that the information that is presented in early childhood development (ECD) courses is redundant. Additionally, learning styles of individuals differ. If some students grasp the information presented quickly, and some others need more exposure, it might seem repetitive to the former ones.

Child development classes are core requirements and are essential classes in the early childhood teacher education program. Naturally, early childhood teacher education programs are designed to ensure that the graduates are knowledgeable about child development

and education before they exit the program (Arizona Department of Education, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2001; Hyson, 2003). Certainly, some individuals need to take courses starting from the most basics.

However, it is no use if there are some who are not benefiting from these courses. Even though classes intend to provide students with new information when they are designed, instructors do not have an opportunity to test students' knowledge before they enter the classroom. When they start teaching, their syllabus is already formed and it is unlikely that they will change it. Even if they try to change it according to student needs, it can be quite challenging to meet the varying needs of every individual in a class size of 25–150 students.

As heard during the interviews with Belle, she felt repetitiveness in ECD classes that were offered throughout the program. Coming to the program with some knowledge about child development, she felt the information was repetitive for her. However, she realizes that some others might start the program with very limited or no knowledge of ECD:

It seemed that they covered the same things. But they were supposed to be a little different. It was ECD like 200, ECD 300 something. It didn't seem that the information has changed. So that was kind of frustrating because it seemed like a little bit of a waste of time for me. Now being in education there are so many other things I think that the program should offer you, especially for brand new teacher. (Belle)

Instead of courses that were repetitive and focusing on already established knowledge of students, offering courses that are more practical in teachers' first years of teaching was emphasized by one participant as follows:

So I kind of wish that there was more emphasize on classes that you know you are going to teach more into school, you know. I don't understand why I had to take a math class that taught me math all over again in education. Why not take a class 'teach how to teach math'. I mean, yes if you are stupid and you can't do this equation, and you are going to be a teacher. (Kayla)

Individuals' reactions to the same course might be very different.

While Kayla was talking about the benefits of the course on children's literature, Sofia, who nannied her siblings and other children for many years, and also had experience in her mother's early childhood setting expressed her negative feelings toward the course:

I just paid no attention, whatsoever. It was find books for early childhood, they went over 0 to 1 year like in three weeks. I mean it was pretty boring. It wasn't like, it didn't really pertain to a lot of aspects of teaching. Like 'How do you teach a 6 months old?' Now that I have a 3 year old, 1 year old. I do know how to engage with them, and show them different things. No it wasn't like. It was literally 'Here is the book, here how a 6 months old look like. They will be crawling, they might be.' You know that kind of stuff, instead of 'How would you, if you had 1 year-old classroom, what kind of project would you do to help them to increase their fine-motor skills, increase their gross-motor skills?' It wasn't. That would be a good ECD class.

Find books for ages 3-4 you know, I remember this project, seriously I had to find 15 books for the kids 3-4, and I had to write summary out of each of them. And I had the test every three months about the information that was presented on

an overhead. And like I said I won't do well on tests. So I was just kind of 'Zoned out'. And yes that how my early childhood class was. And I think 'the infants and toddlers', too. It was the same way, just use overhead, here is the book information, find the toys. That was what they got us to do. Find the toys that they could play with. And write a summary about it, and turn it in. (Sofia)

Libby sensed the same repetition as well:

I remember when I was going through it. I thought that some of them were like kind of repetitive. (Libby)

Issues related to classes taken in the program were the first themes examined. One of the common dissatisfaction among participants is that instructors focused on too much theoretical knowledge and they did not relate course content to real-life experiences (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Kagan, 1992). Students' learning can be increased by combining coursework and fieldwork which allows students "to apply what they learn in class to real-life experience" (Vartuli & Rohs, 2009, p.323). When students do not relate the course content to real-life experience, it is more likely that they will not retain most of the information they have learned. Therefore, they develop the belief that these courses are a waste of time and have no use.

Dissatisfaction regarding some instructors was one outcome that is important to mention. Presenting too much theory rather than hands-on activities or real-life examples, and limited teaching styles for students with diverse learning styles were the main concerns that

were brought up by participants. Some stated that these instructors were mostly doctoral students. Knowing that they were mostly doctoral students, it is possible that they were much more critical of these instructors.

There is one teacher I didn't like. I still don't like her. Because, she taught the reading class, how we are supposed to teaching reading. I feel like a horrible failure everyday when I try to teach reading. Because she did not teach us how to teach it.... Well, I know one of my professor, he was a doctorate student and he didn't start doing that (Olive)

Expressing her dissatisfaction with some instructors' teaching styles, Kayla was not shy to offer a solution: find fun instructors through a screening.

I don't wanna pay to sit in a classroom, when I could find out the information in a book. So I think it would be more beneficial if teachers were really screened, before handling a classroom..... That way they can kind of weed out the ones that don't necessarily need to be here. And make sure that the ones that should be here have jobs or get new people here, make interesting and college fun, and not boring. (Kayla)

Although Libby was not very critical of her instructors at ASU, her preference was toward the instructors who had Pre K–3 teaching experience. She believes that they can provide students with more practical knowledge.

I thought all of my teachers were really good. I mean some ones are better than others. I found that the ones that had teaching experience I usually liked or just felt like benefited more. Just because they had the knowledge, even after going through the whole program, you like just have to learn so much after you get



into the classroom. So I think that having the people that have been through, you know being in a classroom, planning and dealing with everything that comes up, I think it helps just the understanding of what we're going through and stuff like that. (Libby)

When students enter the classroom they expect that the instructor will provide information that is not presented in the textbook. In most cases, they want instructor to give them abundant real-life examples related to the course content. Similarly, preservice teachers from Binks, Smith, Smith, and Joshi's (2009) study expressed a great benefit when instructors' related their real-life experiences to their classroom teaching and felt a desire to hear more of those experiences.

Another factor that may contribute to the situation could involve a group view of the instructor. At this age cliques are common. If their clique take a stance toward an instructor, it is possible that the other members will follow the same path.

As much as these participants were dissatisfied with some courses, other participants' needs and expectations were greatly satisfied.

Olive spoke highly of some of her courses and instructors. Seeing the examples she has given, it is clear that instructors who make a connection between course-content and real-life experiences are the ones she liked. Another factor is that these instructors required them

to create portfolios that included activity examples for different grade levels which they could use when they start teaching.

A couple of my classes were perfect. I've learned a lot. I literally have the portfolios for these classes. I go back and like today that activity that I remembered for my math class. I pulled that out for my students. And I still reference that a lot. My math teacher – I am sure that she still works here, she made us to make these folders for activities, lesson plans, and stuff. She made everybody write lesson plans and present them. All the different grades, different subjects, or different strengths like geometry, all these different things with math. So, having that, it so neat and like perfect. And I can just open it up and find something. My art notebook too, I open it up and look for stuff. (Olive)

Libby was also highly satisfied with some courses and instructors. Like Olive, she talked about using activities from some of these course portfolios during her teaching.

And I learned a lot from her in particular. I had her later for math. And she was, I'd say, good, because she was a teacher and she knew like things that sort of like methods like would help us to be successful. And in that class the big project was making a thematic unit. We did like our, we made art notebook. A lot of stuff from her classes, I pull out all the time when I am teaching. She was really, definitely the most like influential professor I think I had there. And I just use the things that she taught most. (Libby)

Similarly, Kayla liked the courses that were useful when she started teaching.

The ECD ones at the end of the program, right before the student teaching, I think were the best. I mean I know this is ... I took a children's literature class; I mean it was one of the best classes I have ever taken. And it wasn't hard by any means, we read books, and we talked about children's literature, but it was

actually very informative for teaching. It doesn't sound like it would be, but it really was. And the person who taught it was phenomenal. And she did such a good job. (Kayla)

They also expressed a need for more courses in some areas, such as language/ literacy/ reading, classroom management, special education, English Language Learners (ELL) and psychology classes. Most teachers enter the profession with limited teaching experience—internships and student teaching assignments that are completed under a mentor in an already established setting and with consistent rules and expectations already established. Therefore, when novices start teaching, they feel overwhelmed with all of the responsibilities they face alone. Additionally, these novice teachers felt that they are not ready in some areas. One of these areas is reading.

I wish there were more psychology, yeah, I wish we were made to take psychology classes. I never took psychology, like child brain – well we kind of did brain development. I have some crazy kids in my classroom, I want to know what is going on in their brain more, you know. I wish I had more psychology background. (Olive)

Reading is another area that participants felt the need for more preparation. Kayla did not feel that reading was emphasized enough when she was in the program. She expressed her dissatisfaction toward the reading class she had taken in the program.

When I was in the program, there wasn't enough emphasis on teaching reading. I think I took one class, and it was even mixed with another class, the same time, it was like you learn reading

and you learn something else in this class. It was like science and reading class together, in one. And what makes it hard when you go out into work force is the reading is huge, it is the basis of your day. I mean reading is in everything. If you don't know how to effectively teach reading, then, when you are in an interview, you look like an idiot who cannot even answer the questions. So I like studied about all this reading and stuff, to even know what I was talking about when I am in interviews. And it wasn't until I started teaching, I was like 'Oh my gosh, I don't feel like I have learned any of these in college.' They did not prepare me for this at all. And that is the part of the reason, when I started my masters that why I am doing language and literacy. (Kayla)

The lack of content/methods appeared again as they started working as a teacher. For example, they had problems communicating with ELL children or their families.

Olive, a native English speaker, did not speak any Spanish. As she started her first year of teaching, she struggled with Spanish-only-speaking students whom comprised 80% of her classroom.

At the beginning of the year, I had 30 kindergarteners, by myself, which made me want to quit. Because, they make you think in the program that you may have an aide, and you don't. This year the same thing. But this year 30 kindergarteners and an ELL class. 90% didn't speak any English, and haven't been to school before. That was insane. And I ended up with 5 kids speaking English and the rest didn't know anything. (Olive)

As she remembered what she learned in ELL courses at ASU, she thought that it would have been better if course content was connected to real-life experiences.

I remember that ESL or SEI class. Because, they taught us lesson plan format for the sheltered English immersion, I think

you were supposed to use for ELLs, but they didn't make us use them, If they made us use those in the classroom, it'd be better. [I'd] be more familiar with it. Because, I am re-learning all of those that. I am like 'Oh yeah I remember this, but never used it.' Because, I never had to. You know what I mean? (Olive)

Olive also sympathized with those Spanish-speaking children and thought that they did not learn much academic knowledge.

My African kids knew English. That was good news. They all speak English at least a little bit, but my Hispanic kids maybe 1 or 2 knew how to speak a little. And the rest, the rest were like 'day one, I have no idea what you are saying?'. So first, I had to figure out a couple of Spanish phrases like 'sit down', 'come here', like 'do this'. I had to figure out to say those things in Spanish. But honestly, those kids didn't learn any content for the first 2-3 months that I taught them. They learned English, they picked it up really fast, most of them. But didn't learn anything other than English, those first couple of months. Because, they were just sitting there, like 'What is she saying? I have no idea'. (Olive)

In Arizona, most of ELL students come from Hispanic heritage, therefore they speak Spanish. Having a child from a primarily ELL population, Kayla had some difficulties communicating and interacting with them.

There was a structured English immersion class, the original SEI class where you got whatever hours you needed. Originally I took that. It was difficult because last year the ELLs, all spoke perfect English to me, they were about to exit out of the program, but they struggled in reading and writing. So it wasn't a communication problem. Verbally they knew every word. It was fine, but at the end of the year there was a person from China who came in, who probably knew five English words. So I was just trying to get him through the day, to start learning some basic English and teaching the kids how to interact with him. (Kayla)

Belle, on the other hand, had a different experience than other participants since she was bilingual in English and Spanish. Her students knew that she could speak Spanish and was familiar with Hispanic culture, so they saw her as a role model. Even though Olive was not feeling comfortable in speaking Spanish—she was more comfortable with English and she believes that she has an English accent when speaking in Spanish—with her students, she was very proud knowing that her students looked up to her.

Last year I taught first grade, structured English immersion. So my entire class were Spanish-speakers. And I understand the language and I can speak it. But I am embarrassed to speak it because it won't come out properly. And my parents spoke it only to each other when they didn't want us to know what they were talking about. But I picked up a few things, and communicate just a little bit. So last year it was just an awesome experience for me to see these little girls who'd tell me that they went home and played school. Even in the classroom during free time, they'd play school or they'd tell me about my clothes and stuff like that. Now I see them. They are now in second grade, and they'd come and give me a hug. And meeting parents, parents telling me that their daughters are looking up to me. I felt last year that I was influencing them. Being Hispanic, and not many of us out there, and now more and more Hispanics are going into education, more females. But I felt that last year that I was influencing them. (Olive)

Issues involving inclusive education were also a significant factor in first-year teachers' success. Having children with special needs in her classroom, Olive realized that she was not adequately prepared:

Did we even take special a educations class? I think maybe one. But, we needed to do more of that, because, there are so many kids. I think more of also identifying special ed. kids in the classroom, and being able to have show data, because that is what I have a problem with now. There are a couple kids that I suspect, but I don't know to show the data to back myself up. Like I am trying to figure it out, because I am in the masters program, and trying to figure it out.

Maybe they taught me and I don't remember, but I think I remember that class being really technical, and like 'this is what autism is, this is whatever is', but, not how to figure that out in a kid that you have in the classroom, or how to differentiate for that. That is another thing that is hard. Having to differentiate instruction for that one kid when you have 24 was difficult. Like I have 25 kids, and I have one kid that I have to teach in a different way. Like how to do that. Maybe differentiated instruction classes, too. Because, I don't remember learning any of that, and differentiation. I don't think I knew what that was, until I went into classroom. I don't think I had ever heard that. In my reading class, I should have heard that. (Olive)

Overall the participants in this study felt they did not get enough preparation and knowledge about the identification of learning and developmental disorders in children during their coursework in the program. All these problems that they face in their first year also make them feel that they wish they had more psychology classes to understand children's brain development and their behavior.

**Internships.** The goal of internships is to provide students with opportunities to observe and engage in real classroom practices and gain experience before their student teaching assignments.

Students at ASU need to complete three internships, for six hours a

week for 12 weeks each semester. Several grievances emerged throughout interviews regarding their internship experiences. Overall dissatisfaction toward internship was the belief that they were not as effective as they were supposed to be. It seems that internships did not serve their purpose for some of these teacher candidates.

Olive makes a comparison of her view as a student and as a teacher. As a student she did not like going to schools every week for a couple hours. As a teacher she understands the importance of having various field experiences before entering the teaching career:

Knowing how was helpful as a teacher, not remembering how I was as a student: If I were a student I'd say 'none of it'. I'd say no internships, just student teaching, because they are so time consuming', but I almost would say make, like instead of making.... I know is completely different.... The internship is a certain numbers of hours you have to be in there, total, not per week. I think if it were per week it'd be better. Because I stacked mine, I'd go last two weeks, instead of going each week. But, if you like every week, a little bit every week, along the way you see progression, and how the teacher change the things as the students learn. I'd definitely add more. (Olive)

Belle, on the other hand, did not like the way she was viewed by the teachers with whom she was interning. As a parent of two children, she volunteered in her kids' classes. She felt that her internship experiences were not much different than her parent-volunteering experiences. Spending short amount of hours each week – she was there only one day or two days a week, only for 6 hours in total each



week—for her internships, she felt she did not benefit from these internships:

Maybe it could be integrated a little bit more, maybe the assignments with the internships. I think that would help the student as well as your teacher that your interning with. Because as I said, one teacher had me work on the bulletin board and copying. So had she seen me more than just a volunteer going in there. Perhaps I should have told her ‘No, I need to choose a student, a need to follow a student, and study this student.’ Then maybe she would have seen us more as, that I was there for something more than just making copies. (Belle)

Time spent in the classroom for internships is not enough to establish a relationship with teachers or students. All five participants reported some complexity regarding their internship experiences, although they highlighted the role of the teacher they interned with.

Kayla discussed the lack of interaction between her and one of interning teacher:

You weren’t allowed to do all of your hours in one day. You couldn’t, like if kids are in lunch or special, you’d have to make hours later. So I always did all my internships two days a week, so I’d always be there at the same time, and see the same thing has happened. But I mean I didn’t learn that much from her, at all. She wasn’t a bad teacher; she just didn’t interact with me well. (Kayla)

Libby’s internship experiences varied. She largely benefited from the internship that was more interactive. The others were observational only and she felt they didn’t offer as many learning opportunities.

Especially in the earlier internships, like in my first, I wasn’t really doing any teaching at all. And I think I hadn’t developed

early relationships with teachers, so it was harder for me to, her give me the space like time to teach something. And then at the Head Start they were really nice and they kind of let me, you know, do what I needed to do. And then when I was in the reading part, I had known the person that I was interning with for a long time, so she was really helpful and helping me. You know, she kind of planned the lesson with me and helped me understand what I needed to do and things like that. So, I think a lot of that part of it depends on how great your mentor teacher is that you are interning with. (Libby)

Sofia, on the other hand, made a quick comparison to her student teaching experiences:

Internships were ok. They were like 5 hours a week, so it was really kind of like, you show up, you kind of play with kids, you know individually, a couple hours and that was it. It wasn't like you had to take over. (Sofia)

Stacking up all of her hours and completing them in last two weeks, apparently, seemed very convenient at the time. Although now she understands the importance of completing them each week:

The internship is a certain numbers of hours that you have to be in there, total, not per week. I think if it were per week it'd be better. Because, I stacked mine. I'd go the last two weeks, instead of going each week. But, if you like every week, a little bit every week, along the way you see progression, and how the teacher changes the things as the students learn. (Olive)

**Student teaching.** Student teaching is a unique experience during which student teachers gain practical knowledge and experience that is not learned in their courses. "Although they often observe their mentor teachers' lessons, student teachers are

particularly interested in learning rules of thumb and tips for their own lessons” (Meijer, Zanting, & Verloop, 2002, p.406).

Belle who teaches in a public kindergarten in a low-socio-economic neighborhood talks about a knowledge that was only learned with practice.

It is funny, we say that ‘there is not a class to teach you how to detect lice in children’s hair.’ There is not important classes like that, instead you gain from experience. You go and do your student teaching, but that the first year being thrown into a classroom, there is absolutely no preparation for that. (Belle)

Sofia, on the other hand, mentioned about “the little things” that made a big difference in her teaching. She learned these little tricks from her mentor teacher and other more experienced colleagues. Although she has been in the teaching profession for three years, she is still willing to learn as much as she can from more experienced teachers.

I try to make sure that I am still learning as much as possible so that I can continue to help these kiddos, as much as possible. I definitely think that for values that she taught me and true things that she taught me with classroom management. And that it is definitely where I think I took most of it, classroom management, because I mean I knew the content. And little tricks, little things to say, little things to do. They don’t teach you know. Like little, songs to sing to kids, they don’t understand, and I think the little things are kept out and she showed me a lot of those little tricks, and that kind of stuff. I think that was, those little things I still keep with me, and show other people as much as I can. They want to know. (Sofia)

Beginning teachers often emphasizes importance of seeing the whole process that happens in an academic school year. Preservice teachers

who participated in a study conducted by Evart and Straw (2005), similarly, expressed their concern regarding not seeing the whole process such as the end of year pressure. Talking about her K–3 student teaching experience, Belle felt she vastly benefited from this experience since she had an opportunity to see the beginning of a school year.

I went in the beginning of the year. That was awesome. It was so helpful to be able see the beginning. Because that is another thing. Beginning of the year –whew – you do not know or realize what to do in the beginning of the year. So I went with her, I met her at the end of the year, and we talked, because we are a year around school. We talked about ‘Ok, do you want to come to start to meeting?’ So I went starting from the first day, her initial meeting. And from then on I saw what it took to start to open up your classroom, what you need to do and that. When I was thrown into it I was like ‘what, I need to do what?’ (Belle)

Having done her student teaching in the spring semester, Libby did not see all the beginning processes that started in the fall. As she started teaching her own classroom, she realized the difficulties (setting up the classroom and establishing classroom rules, etc.) that were the result of lack of experience for the fall semester:

When I student taught it was in the spring so I really didn’t experience that part of the year. Like where the teacher is setting up the expectations, and I mean she helped me understand like the procedures for, you know, when different things happen; you know how you deal with them. But I wasn’t there when she was setting up the classroom expectations. So I think that would be a really important thing for new teachers to learn. (Libby)

### **The role of the mentors during student teaching.**

Student teaching is commonly viewed by beginning teachers as the most beneficial aspect of the teacher education program. Similarly, mentorship is considered the most beneficial aspect of student teaching. Student teachers' experience with their mentor and guidance from them help to form their identity as a teacher. For example, Belle feels that if one does not like her/his student teaching experience and did not get support in the first year of teaching, s/he will not stay in the profession. Therefore, she put a huge importance on the role of the student teaching experience and support in the first year of teaching:

If don't love it, you are not gonna stick with it. I think going through that if you don't get the full experience, like I said, that first year is frightening. And I'd imagine we lose a lot of teachers if there is no support. Because, it is overwhelming. (Belle)

Having an excellent relationship with her student teacher-mentor, Belle feels this was an important impact on her decision to teach in the school she is working currently:

There is a reason that I am at that school. I am there because of her. The experience I had, I just fell in love with her, the kids, staff, school, with everything. She is an awesome teacher. And I would just sit back kind of in an amazement. It is just so funny, now having my own class, and then seeing her student teachers in there and they will come in and observe my class and stuff like that. My best friend and I talk about that. My student teaching teacher, my mentor student teacher, she was very quiet. She was so quiet, I have never heard her raise her voice.

But yet, students would all work. Now having my own class, I am like ‘Why am I yelling? Why doesn’t she yell?’ I am always thinking about that. But she has been teaching for 15 years now. And it was, that was an awesome experience. (Belle)

Because Libby’s student teaching was arranged through her mother, she was previously familiar with her mentor teacher, but didn’t know her all that well. It turned out there teaching style and personalities were a perfect match.

My student teaching [mentor], it was also somebody that I had known, so it was someone that I knew through my mom. I chose myself. I really mean, it just worked out perfectly. She was the perfect person for me to be with, because we had like very similar teaching philosophy. I mean I was just really lucky, I have resources, and you know my mom knew teachers and things like that. (Libby)

Moreover, this experience might have an effect on their decision to stay or leave the profession. Referring to her student teaching experience with her mentor, she implied that student teachers with negative mentor teacher experience might not have started teaching in the first place.

### **First Year of Teaching Experiences**

Participants in this study often expressed the challenges that they had in the beginning of their career. They talked about never having enough time to get prepared and do other job-related responsibilities. Working after school hours and weekends to catch-up was very common for these beginning teachers. There were also

meetings and seminars/courses that they had to attend, which they were not aware before their graduation. These teachers also expressed the feeling of not being appreciated in return for their hard work.

As Belle talked about her first year of teaching, she mentioned “not having enough time” for her responsibilities.

Right off just setting up your classroom would be major help. Just knowing what you need, exactly. Because you’re that, first year it seemed I was ‘a late shore’ every darn night. (Belle)

It was surprising to Belle that even her husband was not aware of the time-consuming responsibilities of a beginning teacher. She also talks about others’ “lack of appreciation” toward teachers and the general belief that teaching is not a difficult job.

It is funny that, I guess, even my own husband didn’t realize... People just look at teachers as ‘You get there when they get there, and you leave when they go home’. Yeah. My husband was like ‘Why are you staying there until 5 o’clock?’ Last year was horrible. Even the janitor come in and would say ‘are you still here?’, because I couldn’t catch up. It is amazing. That is the other thing. You are not aware of that.

The meetings that you have to attend. There are meeting upon meetings upon meetings upon meetings. Just think if there were teachers who come and tell you exactly what to expect in your first year. You have no prep time. Prep time is 30 minutes maybe and then you need your copying done, and your lesson plan, and your personal business. And do everything in that little bit of time. And then it is funny, but at the end of the day getting ready for the next day, and then if you have meetings, you have to push that back, you know. (Belle)

Developing good relations with teachers with more experience was a good method to ease some of difficulties they faced in their first year. More experienced teachers usually gave advice to these beginning teachers in many ways. Even though first year teachers had a mentor assigned by the district/school they worked in, they were willing to get as much advice and help as needed to survive in their first year.

Luckily, my first year teaching I got hired on the third grade team. And the two members of third grade teacher were awesome. One had just got hired that year, too, but she had like nine years of teaching experience. The other one was a veteran teacher. It was her second year in third grade, and only her second year at that school. So we were relatively new to the school. But we were at varying levels of teaching experience, and we got along amazingly. I don't know how I would have gotten through my first year teaching, to be honest. Because they were a huge support system for me. I mean I was always confident in myself, and always I thought I'd be a good teacher. I didn't turn it in for every little thing, but it was nice to have them there. Especially, since we had to plan the curriculum anyways. And sometimes that would mean like working on weekends. It makes if fun. They were really good friends. So that was really great. (Kayla)

Belle was getting help and advices from her teacher-friend whenever she needed:

And it helps so much making friends with teachers/experienced teachers who have been teaching. My best friend has been teaching for five years now, and she helps me so much, because I am like 'You are doing that? I didn't know that I was supposed to'. Or she'll say 'it is your first year, it is OK'. (Belle)

Being partnered with an-experienced teacher, especially one who teaches the same grade level, was a very effective way to help



beginning teachers. Libby was getting help from her partner-teacher in case there was a behavioral or management issue in her classroom.

There was a first grade teacher that I was partnered up with. And she would sort of be like, not the time out room, but she would be in the room if we ever had to remove her from my room to get out the situation, that is where she would go. And she was really helpful and we have a psychologist and social worker that really helped a lot with her [a student]. That [the student] was really my biggest struggle. (Libby)

Not being familiar with the routines in the beginning of her first year of teaching is also something that Belle learned from others or by experience.

Last year I had a very 'seasoned' teacher who retired. And she made a list for me. She made index cards for me of what I needed to have done in the beginning of the year, middle of the year, and end of the year. Something as silly as their files that you will not get. She made that in red and said 'you have to make sure that their .... files are together because you are gonna get checked 301 money if this is not in order. That is something that has to be done. You have to check out, and make sure that every single paper is in their file.

That is something that I had no idea about. You know what is so funny? Now I am going over my first year... I kept teaching up to the day, the last day of school. And no one said 'No, we don't keep teaching to the very last day. You have to pack up your stuff'. So there is a whole lot of 'check out system'. I didn't know. I was still teaching and the last day of school I was there until 5:30, packing up my classroom. I didn't know everyone stopped teaching weeks before. But there is so much. There is too much. There is so much I think teachers should tell you what you need in the beginning of the year, and what you have to do at the end of the year. (Belle)

However, the converse was also true. If they didn't have an experienced mentor to turn to the job of being a new teacher became much more difficult, as Olive reports.

Well the other kindergarten teacher, she was just like me. So, I wouldn't really talk to her. The other kindergarten teacher just started like 2-3 months later, because we had so many kids in our room. And she never taught kindergarten before. So I was like her mentor. I was like giving her ideas about what to do, even though it was my first year and should've been getting stuff from other people. But it was never like that. It was like I'd come up with ideas and do it. I was like on the computer all the time looking for the stuff and figure out what to do. Yeah, I pretty much did it by myself. (Olive)

**Realities: Management, resources, parental pressure.**

Belle also emphasized that the program at ASU points out the realities of teaching, but students do not fully grasp these realities before they start teaching.

We are told that throughout every block here at ASU that 'If you think this is a job where you get there when you get there, and leave when you leave, you are sadly mistaken.' That was certainly told to us. I was aware of that, because I have kids. But I don't think anyone anticipates the number of meetings that you have to attend and who you are accountable, too. You are not only accountable to administrators. There are parents, there are board members, there is the PTO, there are so many that you are accountable to. It is overwhelming. (Belle)

Similarly, new teachers who were assigned to teach a different grade than in a previous year requires as much work as just starting out the first year teaching. Therefore, teachers feel the same pressure and extra work that they did in their first year of teaching. If they teach

the same grade each year to the similar population, they feel much more comfortable and focus on students' learning rather than "catching-up". Despite all challenges and downsides, these beginning teachers are dedicated to teaching.

Belle expressed her love and passion about young children and teaching, even though she feels that teaching is not appreciated by many, and it is really hard work to stay in the profession:

I wanted them also to help me... 'Wait a second, I didn't know that I have to give that test, how do I give test?' This year teaching kindergarten, my best friend, seeing what she is doing and I am freaking out about it. 'I am not doing that, or I didn't do that way.' And she'll say 'It is your first year, they are kindergarteners, you are not, you gotta let that go. It is OK. You did it this way, or you can do this way.' Or 'You know what you still have time' or 'That is not important.' I think you need someone there to tell you what is important and what is not. Because you just spin, you spin your wheels. You don't know, you know. It is just, it is hard. But I love it. I love it. I love going there every day. It is challenging, it is tiring, it is fun, it is sad, it is happy, it is frustrating, but I just love it. I absolutely love it. (Belle)

Libby's K-3 student teaching was in a kindergarten. After graduation she was employed in the same school and taught the same grade level. Being in the same environment and knowing the student population, she felt that her first year went pretty smooth compared to other beginning teachers' experiences:

My first year went pretty well. I mean, I had, how many, 20 kids? It was kindergarten where I student taught, so that really helped, because I kind of knew what to expect. I knew the

beginning of the year would be a lot different than the end, when I was student teaching. But, I kind of knew the age, and knew sort of what they are learning and things like that. And I feel like I was just really excited to finally have my own room, and I got to set it up to do things that I wanted. It was probably more exciting than everything else. I was a little bit nervous, but I just kind of made sure to be well prepared and plan the things the best way that I could. (Libby)

Olive, an English-only speaker was placed with a mix of children who were from a variety of backgrounds and who had a range of skill levels and learning disabilities. Among other things, she was faced with language barriers and struggled to communicate with her students. While she struggled to communicate with Hispanic children, she also struggled to deal with an African refugee children who had behavioral and emotional problems:

It was like 90% Hispanic and 10% Black. Actually, my black kids were from Africa, African refugees. So they had emotional problems, because in Africa they saw horrible, tragic things. Like one of my kids saw her mom being murdered, and that kind of stuff in Africa. And then they had all those emotional problems. In the classroom they'd flip out with no reason. They were intense, those kids. I loved them but they were rough. (Olive)

Classroom management is a common problem among beginning teachers. Even though beginning teachers gain the knowledge about classroom management in the program, when they start teaching their own classroom, they may not know how to apply that knowledge into

the classroom environment (Bartell & Ownby, 1994 as cited in Smith & Souviney, 1997).

Libby who did not have a very challenging first year compared to others still struggled with classroom management at times:

My first year I'd say that that is the thing [management] you struggle the most with. I mean I knew about our school-wide classroom management plan, because I used it before, but it is really hard to establish that yourself, or establish it really strong. (Libby)

Stating that she was very anxious to apply her ideas in the classroom setting, Olive did not know how to do that in her own classroom.

And I didn't know what to do. Because I had those ideas that you think you will do, but it is totally different. When you are interning and student teaching in somebody else who has already set up the classroom management and style, you don't know how to set up. You have to teach it in a way that you never have never done before. That was hard. (Olive)

The times that I wanted to quit were the times about classroom management, because, just a couple kids would bluntly disobey me which is the worst. Kids have no idea how much power they have. And when they say 'no' to you, it just boiled my blood. And I had a couple. I had one really off-kilter kid who should have been in his own school by himself. He said crazy things. He moved. They pulled him and put him in a different school, so he was the roughest kid in my classroom. He makes me wanna quit all the time. It was like horrible. I have a couple kids like that now who make me wanna quit, because every day is like a battle. And it is exhausting every day. But I know that he is really a nice kid, a really sweet person, loves to help. But he has some developmental problems. His emotional development is like a 2-year old. So he cannot deal with the fact that he cannot get his way all the time. He has the exact same problem as 2–3 years-old tantrums to get his way. And he does that all the time. (Olive)

Unlike her counterparts, Kayla's struggle was not related to management since she had a very good mentor while she was student teaching. However, she was having resource problems for her classroom. To provide a quality teaching experience to her students, she needed many materials that the school and district did not provide. In her first year, Kayla found herself spending a great amount of money to buy resources.

Luckily I had such a good mentor for classroom management and discipline. That would be for the majority 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers' problem and classroom management/discipline. I think I had that down pretty good. I am going to be tuned in years, obviously. I am doing the best I possibly can. But I think the hardest thing for me these last two years is having the resources available to teach the content.

So for example, in math lets say I teach x, I need to have practice worksheets, smart-board software, or a power point presentation. You know some things, somewhere. Or game involving, or center. And not having that stuff is difficult. And trying to follow my teaching philosophy, you know I don't pass out work sheet, so I always work constantly to come up with ways to teach and reinforce skills when I don't have the materials. So that's been difficult.

I spent a lot of money, especially last year, out of my pocket. I can't afford this year. Last year I think I spent \$2-3000 out of my pocket, books for my classroom, games to play, even construction paper, teacher manuals, copies of homework, just everything that I could possibly need. I spent a lot of money. So just having the material there, so I could teach. (Kayla)

Sofia received some guidance from her mentor when it came to classroom management. Although her mentor was quite busy with

administrative related assignments, she would give Sofia advice related to problems she had in her classroom. Yet, it seems that she had to figure out classroom management techniques by herself. Sofia stated classroom related management problems and her way of dealing with these problems as.

The mentor teacher, she taught me a lot. Because I'd still go to her, like I said, she wouldn't come in but I'd still go and say. 'I've done this a thousand times, and it is not working.' She would say 'Just keep doing, you have keep doing it. You just have to be consistent. You just cannot give up. You'll get it.' Because that first month is hard. Time out, you know. There was a lot of, especially when like I said the screaming in the classroom, or not putting things away, and running around, and the violence that little boys hitting each other, and then wrestling that kind of stuff. You know 'This is not appropriate, you know these are classroom rules that we keep our hands, feet and mouth to ourselves. You need to go sit out.'

When the time is out, they would come out and 2 seconds later they'd do it again. 'Ok. You need to go sit back down' You know sometimes the whole play time period they were in and out. I was like 'Oh, gosh, gosh'. I was mainly those other teachers who were saying that 'Just keep doing it. You are doing OK. Just keep doing it.' So that is kind of how I, I mean I have always been a, known what done with the time out, that kind of stuff. I am not a big fan of, I don't personally believe and extrinsic rewards. I am not one of those teachers who 'If you do good I will give you a sticker, or a marble'. You know I don't like that red light/green light, that kind of system. I am very much about teaching children to have their, to be proud of how they behave, because they are little people and they should behave like that. Not like someone is bribing them with something.  
(Sofia)

Having a different view on classroom management than school administration, she felt pressure to apply the way the administration wanted her to handle classroom management.

I got into trouble in my first year for that, too. They wanted me to give them rewards for behaving correctly. And I wouldn't do it. You know if they are making good choices, then they get the things that are great. If they are not making good choices, then they will lose those things. I am not going to say 'Oh, you weren't, if you made a bad choice, but If you behave tomorrow I will give a sticker or a lollipop.' I told them 'I am not gonna do it'. That is really what they wanted me to do. It is amazing how many teachers are doing it. Even now I walk the hall and 'You are not earning your marbles.' Or 'You are not gonna get that pizza party.' And I am just going 'Hmmm.' Like I said everyone has a different way of teaching. And still they discipline. Some do it with hopes and rewards and that kind of stuff. Mine is just kind of more consistency and a lot of praise when they are making good choices. (Sofia)

Sofia's biggest challenge was not classroom management. Although she struggled with classroom management, dealing with some parents who were too critical of her surpassed other problems she encountered:

1<sup>st</sup> year, I was with children the whole time. It was wonderful. Obviously it was a learning experience. As I said last time, managing the class was not the hardest thing. For me, the most difficult thing about being a teacher is the parents and the administration. Because I just really feel like they don't support teachers, even the administration. Parents coming in and sitting in the back of the room, and writing their letters of what you are doing wrong, and the books to be read, and how they handle their one child at home and how you are supposed to manage 25 children. And you know you are just like 'Hmmm?' and you are just supposed to suck it all in, suck it up and just keep apologizing, keep apologizing, keep letting all those adults walk all over you. So for me, it was just kind of learning how to toughen up, you know. Because being an early childhood



teacher, I kind of still equate myself to being young, that is why I work with young children, but dealing with their parents is a whole different ball game. (Sofia)

Working in a charter school, Sofia did not receive the administrative support she sought for her problems with parents. Instead, she was repeatedly advised to ignore or even apologize for her teaching style that parents did not approve of. Sofia thinks that this helped her to learn how to deal with some parents. After working two years in that school, Sofia chose to leave the charter school and found a job in a Title-I school, in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year of teaching.

**Induction Programs.** Many districts have formal induction programs for first year teachers. First year teachers are offered a mentor by the district and school administration. These mentors are usually are chosen from senior teachers who teach in the same school and teach the same grade level. Even though Belle was offered a mentor during her first year of teaching, she did not benefit as much as she hoped. As a part of this induction program, first year teachers were required to meet with their mentor and principal on a regular basis to discuss various topics related to teaching. Belle did not see much benefit of these meetings and she felt that it was time-consuming. She would have rather spent time in her classroom getting prepared.

Last year in my school, they offer us mentor teacher in your first year. As I said she retired last year. She was a season teacher. And she did. She was an awesome teacher. I learned a lot from her. We would do planning together, met together. But then my school also required that we meet as a whole group once a month. It took my time, the time that I needed in my classroom and preparing or stuff like that. It was frustrating that even that wasn't beneficial for me. I didn't learn anything there. (Belle)

Kayla taught third grade her first year, however her mentor was a sixth grade teacher. Her mentor teacher was, mostly, a source she could go to for problems related to classroom management:

I was given the option of having a mentor at school, or not. I decided to pick one. He was a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher over there. And he was good. It was good help, but I went to him more for things like needing help with discipline, those sort of things like. I would say 'Here is what this kid is doing.' You know 'I've tried this, and this. Can you help me to come up with some ideas that I could do?' So he was really helpful in that manner. (Kayla)

Libby, on the other hand, had teammates in her first year of teaching. These teammates were much more experienced teachers and she benefited from these teachers' experience and knowledge. These teachers' support and guidance helped Libby to have a better first year of teaching:

Teammates are like teachers who teach the same grade that I teach. So there were three other kindergarten teachers. They were more experienced than me. All of them had been teaching. One of them was my mentor during student teaching, and she had been teaching 20 years or more. She retired last year. One of them had been teaching kindergarten for 10 years, and the other one maybe 5 or 6 years. So they all had pretty good experience. So they were just helpful, because we planned. They

were really good about planning and walking me through everything.

But then in the second part of the year, I was teaching what I had taught during my student teaching, so that was kind of easy as well. And they really helped me just a lot of different things that happened. You know, I always knew that I could always ask them for support if I needed. You know if I had a question, and things, they were the ones that I'd go to rather than anybody else. (Libby)

Olive was not lucky in terms of her mentor in her first year of teaching.

Her mentor was not there most of the time because of her pregnancy, although Olive benefitted from her expertise when she was there.

Olive had to figure out solutions by herself when she did not know what to do in some situations:

I had a really good mentor. But she went on maternity leave for two months, which was horrible. She was really good when she was there, and she was really helpful. But if she hadn't been pregnant, it'd been so much better. She'd get really, really sick and would leave right after school. But once she had the baby then sometimes she'd stay a little bit later and I'd talk to her and we'd work together on a lesson plan and stuff. And it was really helpful. Because she was really smart and she knew a lot about it. But she was gone, so it was harder. (Olive)

Similar to Belle's experience, Olive also needed to attend mentor-mentee meetings on a regular basis to discuss some issues. Olive, as well, did not see any benefits of these meetings:

We had these horrible mentor-mentee meetings that we had to go to every month. Which I wanted to, at first when I heard about it. I thought 'this is going to be awesome to learn stuff'. But no. It was horrible. We talked about engagement. Every single time it was the same thing. Every single time, I've never

learned anything in those meetings. It was a waste of time. And I really wanted to. I hoped that I could have learned more. And towards end of the year, she realized we weren't getting anything out of it, so she would let us like talk to other grade levels. But it was never in the collaborative nature that I wanted it to be. And I really never learned anything. And she would come to our classroom to observe us sometimes. It was waste of time. (Olive)

Having a rough year, Sofia did not get much help from her mentor who was assigned by her school administration. She felt that her mentor was blaming her instead of giving her constructive criticism. Not only did she experience lack of support from her mentor teacher, but also she was warned by administration not to seek help from other teachers with whom Sofia had good relations.

Yes, the teacher I was with, she was supposed to be the mentor teacher. But she was so busy doing stuff for the administration that I never had anybody to help in my classroom. It was pretty rough. It was part of a lot of the other conflict. Because I'd say something like 'I am a first year teacher, and you guys are ignoring me, I need help with this. There would be no help, it would be no conversation like 'What can I help you with?'. All of a sudden she'd pull me to the office and 'This is what this said and this happened, and you know this happened.' 'You know a lot of what you are saying and this is what you are doing'. It was never like 'Come in, would you like help with this?' I don't think it was hurtful, because I'd still go to her and she would talk to me and give me ideas, but she was being so bombarded with the stuff, she needed to do for administration.

Because part of mentor teacher program job is supposedly to come the classes and help the teachers, and she was never in my classroom. So I made good relation with one of the teachers. The other teachers who wasn't my mentor teacher. I actually got into trouble with that. I was told that I was supposed to use my mentor teacher for any aide/help. And I said 'Well, but she is not

able to help me, because she is always helping you. I thought this was a team environment, and this teacher can help me as well.' 'That is not her job, if you need help you need to go to her [mentor teacher]'. I mean it was a lot of politics, I'd say. I didn't understand. I asked 'Why I cannot go to her? What is the difference?' They are just 'She is not your mentor teacher.' She was there for many years, and she was a wonderful teacher [the other teacher]. And she was willing to help. It was just the administration. (Sofia)

Thus, statements from participants showed that mentorship in their first year of teaching was critical to how they experienced their first year. Corresponding to Andrew and Quinn's (2005) results, this study revealed that a strong mentorship eased up these participants transition from college to their teaching careers, while a weak mentorship caused a feeling of isolation and lack of support.

**Are beginning teachers given more challenging classes?** Research regarding beginning teachers over the past two decades suggest that beginning teachers are often given classes that are more challenging (NCCTQ, 2007). Responding to that statement, participants of this study stated different point of views based on their experiences.

Libby responded to that statement as follows:

I'd say at our school that is kind of true, because a lot of times we get the siblings of the kids we taught. So even this year, I have siblings of kids that I have already taught. And so, the other teachers had been teaching there for a while and so they got all the siblings and they got a lot of the families that they knew. A lot of people request those teachers, because they know

about them. I'd say they just feel more comfortable with an experienced teacher rather than a new teacher. So the experienced teachers are getting all the requests, and they are getting you know families that they already know. And kids, a lot of the times the kids from these families are prepared for school. So I'd probably be getting more the ones that are either new to the school, or weren't involved enough to ask for a certain teacher and things like that. (Libby)

Libby believes that this might be true due to different reasons.

Parents who are heavily involved in their children's education usually prefer teachers who are more experienced and well known. Parent involvement is considered indicators of well-behaved children who are less likely to have behavioral and emotional problems. It is also considered that these children get more attention from their parents regarding homework, and are more successful academically.

Yes. I do. Because the teacher who retired this year, her class is a class of angels. She has 5 [kids] less than I do. They are always walking in a perfect line. And they are always super quiet. And I asked her 'what do you do to get your kids like that?', and she is said 'it is just the class, they just listen and just do it what they are told.' I am thinking 'If only, if only I had such a class.' But, I think you learn best through those kids. I mean they are the hardest ones, but you learn the most about yourself, and what you lack as a teacher. And you learn where your limits are. That is what I had to learn. (Olive)

I don't think they thought 'Oh, there is a 1<sup>st</sup> year teacher going to be here, so lets give her these kids'. You know, they couldn't even know that I was going to be there to teach. It is just these classroom have teachers in them, and these ones will have somebody. So, I don't think they purposely did anything like giving me a specific type of classroom in my 1<sup>st</sup> year teaching. (Kayla)

New graduates usually find jobs in neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status (SES). One reason is that experienced teachers choose to go to schools in middle/high SES neighborhood. Consequently, new graduates have a higher chance of getting a job in low SES schools. There are some benefits for new teachers who work in low SES schools. For example, loans are waived or low interest student loans are provided as part of the Title-I. This is an Act to provide financial support “to school systems across the country to improve education for children at risk of school failure who live in low-income communities” (PES, 1999, para.1).

Belle received a scholarship, and in return of this scholarship she has to serve in Title-I schools for at least three years.

I made a three year commitment in a low socioeconomic school... [Name of scholarship] did all my placements. Signing on for that scholarship, I am required to work in low SES school districts.(Belle)

Kayla reasons her decision in working Title-I school as:

To be honest, every school that I interviewed at were low-income Title I schools. And that didn't bother me. When I did my internship in a Title I school, I actually really liked it. And I am not gonna lie, the incentive of getting 'my little forgiven' of \$5,000 is, when working a Title I school for 5 years was definitely in back of my mind, too. Why not? And I, actually, wanted to work in a Title-I school, to be honest. You know some of the schools I went to, which were definitely not Title I. And you know those schools have more money to deal with different types of problems than the schools that have less money, a lower income neighborhood. (Kayla)

Because of available daycare for her daughter, Sofia originally chose to work in a charter school. After two years, and many challenges with the schools administration, she began looking for a position in a Title I school.

I did all of my internships but my student teaching in a Title-I. I really wanted to teach in Title-I. I always wanted to teach in Title-I. But it was my daughter, having my daughter and having that school have a nursery in the school just for me it was too hard to say, you know, 'NO'. Because I didn't have the money not to work, and I didn't wanna put her in someplace [distant from her workplace]. So I never intentionally wanted to teach in a charter school. I always wanted a Title-I. Just the opportunity that presented itself and considering where I was in my family life, it was the best decision that I could make for my family.

The first year I was 'OK, it will get better.' I went to the director. In the second year it didn't get any better, and it was gonna happen again, so I was like 'No. Thank you. I am done with the director again.' And of course they didn't wanna fire me, they didn't want me leave or anything. They didn't have anything bad to say about my assessments, it wasn't that my kids were doing bad. It was literally personality-wise, it didn't work for me, because I want to be somewhere, first of all, where they support teachers. (Sofia)

Sofia presented a couple different reasons of why she wanted to teach in Title-I school in the first place. Two of these reasons were "financial benefits" and to be a part of this community to provide educational opportunities to young children—who deserve it as any other individuals—in Title-I school.

Well, I wanted to work in a Title-I for, actually, a couple reasons. As a person who is paying for her own education, there



is grant money that, they will help you pay for your loans, if you work in Title-I schools for a certain amount of years. So if I work in Title-I schools for 5 years, they will pay off 75% of my loans. A lot. Like I said, when you are person who is paying for school yourself, that is a lot of money. And it is really helpful. Also, I really wanted to be, I am not one who thinks that children in low income need to be saved. I know there are people who think that they are. I don't think that there is anything wrong with them. I think that they love the way their families are, and they are happy people. I just think that they need a better education. And I don't think that the people give them enough credit.  
(Sofia)

## **Second Year of Teaching**

It is assumed that if one had a year of teaching experience, the following year, s/he should have a less challenging teaching year compared to their first year. Nonetheless, participants of this study show variety in terms of their experience in their second and third years. Although some reported an easier second year, the others stated dissimilar experiences. Still, all stated some challenges in some aspects of their second year teaching.

Having an easier year in her second year, Libby, still spent the same amount of time and effort to get prepared for her class. A critical change is that her students' learning was the focus of her preparation rather than her preparation to just teach the lesson.

My second year was a lot easier... But I'd say teaching-wise I felt much more comfortable, just because I had done everything; the curriculum, I wasn't trying to come up with ideas. I had sort of done everything before. So I was spending less time planning, well I guess I wasn't spending less time, I was just putting as

much as time, but I was sort of being able to reflect on what did work, and what didn't work. And so you know when I was preparing the lessons and everything, I was thinking 'they didn't get that last year, so I'd do a different way', or you know 'I need to make sure say this before that'. So I felt more prepared and kind of knowing what to expect, like when I taught them something new, this might help, or things like that. So I felt like I could better sort of create a successful environment for the students. (Libby)

Olive's experience in her second year showed that she was still focused on her survival. Her school, her program, and her grade change in her second year of teaching, which was why Olive to felt the same pressure and anxiety as in her first year. On top of her teaching responsibilities she was also assigned to school-related assignments putting more pressure on her.

I'd say it was the same as hard, because I switched the grades and I switched the schools, and I switched reading programs and math programs. So I had to learn all that stuff all over again. And figure out what 1<sup>st</sup> graders coming to the class knowing. It is totally different. I'd say it was as equally as difficult as my first year. It is exactly equal. I wanted to quit just as many times as the first year. But at my new school I don't have many friends as I did in my old school. It is a little bit less collaborative in nature.

People are more like just kind of be by themselves, at the school that I am now. And there a lot of them have been teaching there really long time, so they are just really old school and do things their way. And that is just about it. They don't really like collaboration like I do. But, I get along with my principal great. She likes me a lot. She always make me do stuff. I am like on every committee. And I do all these things. It is horrible. I think she knows that I don't say 'No'. She signs me up for everything. And then I just go and do it. (Olive)

Having spent her weekends to get prepared last year, Kayla's preparation time decreased in her second year. Teaching the same grade in the same school, and no change in curriculum made her job a lot easier this year. Knowing what to expect from students and how to handle 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students was also a big factor in this change. She was more comfortable in her teaching and her relationships with her students.

Overall, this year is a lot easier than last year. Just because of my personality, I mean I'd come in every weekend to plan, because everything was so new. You know, I've never taught that story before. I've never taught that skill before. I don't have any activities for it. I don't have any centers. So it would mean spending 5 hours in school on Sunday to perfectly plan my weekend to get everything together. I don't have any folder set up. It was a lot of work last year. And then I kept everything I can possibly could. So this year I put in all that extra work, because things changed. But it was nice to have a lot of experience and ideas about activities and things that were saved in examples I had already made.

So, I have just learned that every year, I teach to the year ahead. Like, I am going to do this and keep an example that I did or that a student did. It is all becoming more clear. You know this year is also a lot easier because the population of my kids. Because last year, I don't know if it was because I was so much a first year teacher, or if it was more because of the population of kids that I had in my class. They were a harder group, discipline-wise they had a lot more issues than the group I had this year.

And of course this year I mean I feel like I am more equipped to deal with it. And I am feeling like I understand my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade audience better. I know how they think, I know how they act, how they feel. I could see what they are going to do before they do it. And it is a lot easier to kind of plan for their

behaviors and actions, and their learning ahead of time. So I don't have to do it as often. So making the adjustments before it happens, so I don't deal with it, now that I understand how 3<sup>rd</sup> graders work. It is a lot of easier this year, because of the things I've gone through before. (Kayla)

## **Support From Family and Friends**

Emotional support is a key factor in teachers' survival in their beginning years. As so many challenges make it harder for teachers to stay in the profession, the amount and quality of emotional support helps them to overcome these challenges and learn new skills to deal with these challenges, eventually survive in this tough period.

Libby's mom and her student teaching mentor were her biggest sources of emotional support when she had any problem at school. Not trusting some teachers in her school, she knew that she could trust her mom and mentor teacher. Not only were they trustworthy, but they were also supportive instead of judgmental.

Probably my mom, because she is a teacher. You know, I knew I could trust her. There is such a big gossip mill in school. I am still very careful, you know. If I am having trouble with things I don't always go and tell everyone at the school. Because, definitely not certain people. And one of the other kindergarten teachers, I have to be careful what I have to say to her, because she'll just tell everyone in the whole school. She is kind of a gossip.

So, Susan who was my mentor during my student teaching, I know I can trust her, if I was having trouble like with a parent or student, or I needed advice. I knew I could ask her. And she would just be very supportive and she wouldn't really judge me, she wouldn't say 'You did this wrong.' She

would just was supportive. I knew I could, because that is what I need I guess. I don't want anyone to tell me what to do better, I just want them to say 'It is OK, it is going to be OK.' And so she was very helpful in that way. And then my mom also, you know, she would give me a lot of advice if I was having trouble with you know co-teacher, kids, or parents. I knew I could you know talk to her about those sort of things. (Libby)

Another person who was emotionally supporting Libby was her roommate. Having similar problems as her teacher roommate, Libby could relate to her roommate, and they could support each other in that matter.

My friend, my roommate teaches. So I could always talk to her about things, and we sort of had similar experiences. We could talk about that sort of thing. I mean for the most part the most difficult thing was that challenging student. She was probably the most emotionally draining part of the year; because I just didn't know how to help her and I really wanted to.

But it was kind of out of my control. And that was really hard for me to deal with. I mean they were days, I'd just go home and cry, because it was really a hard day. But, and I could talk, you know, sometimes I just had to deal with things by myself, too. I figured them out, so I would definitely say they were really supportive, I mean those people, my mom, my mentor teacher, and then my roommate. And I went to them the most. I think, because they were/are teachers and they may have had a similar experience. They knew what I was going through, at least they could say 'Tomorrow is going to be a better day, it is OK.' But I didn't really felt completely overwhelmed, like 'I can't do that. I am not going to be able to finish.' I never felt like that. I never felt like quitting. And I still have never ever felt like I needed to, or I wanted to really needed to quit. (Libby)

Sofia has received, mostly, emotional support from her husband.

Another beginning teacher in her first year of teaching was also a

person with whom Sofia could share her feelings, frustration, and problems related to the classroom and school.

I'd just go to him [Sofia's husband]. Just usually him. I have other friends, actually one of the friends; she was at the same school as me, the first year. I was first year teacher, she was 3<sup>rd</sup> year teaching. She has been in the district for the first two years. She was in and out that year. But, in general, yeah it is pretty much him. He is the pretty much the person if I have any question, if I am frustrated, if I am stressed out, about anything.... If it comes to the classroom, I am kind of on my own, I'd say right now. (Sofia)

Believing that there are politics in the school environment, Sofia was careful about who to talk to or what to say to other teachers.

Before I'd go to, not my mentor teacher, but the other teacher at the school, because charters schools have a lot of politics. Because she had been there for 8 years, when the director who used to be the principal hired her. And she was the one when I was going to when they told me not to go anymore, but they never messed with her, they never drag her to any meetings, no matter what she did. And she is still there and do their own little thing and you know that kind of stuff. But, so that is why I mean it is all politics. She had been there so long, and she is friends with the director. The principal and the vice principal weren't gonna force her to do what they want, but I was a first year teacher who didn't have all those ties with people who been there for a long time.

And it was the same with my friend. I did go to her, and still do but not in the sense of support of work. She really helped me with math. My strengths were in language, reading. And I learned that she is a great math teacher. I learned a lot of little tricks by watching her teach math. She would come in for me. She would come in and model things for me' She would come in and show things for me. I would take notes. She would teach me lesson forming. So she helped me a lot. So I'd say that those people and I still talk to her. I'd say those two teachers and my husband, and my dad. Those are the people that I'd go to. (Sofia)

Even though teachers entered the profession with a positive attitude toward the teaching profession, their attitudes changed after they soon encountered many difficulties. For example Sofia's view toward the profession changed—even though her passion to teach children still remains strong—after she realized that there were many dynamics that she didn't approve of. Although her attitude remained positive overall, it is not at the same level that it was in the beginning. Ryan (1986) calls this change of attitude toward teaching the curve of disenchantment.

### **Program Preparation**

Graduating with one of the highest grade point averages, Libby felt that the program prepared her well in some areas and was not quite adequate for some others. She believes that the program could have prepared her better in classroom management. However, she also states that the program could never prepare anyone fully for her/his teaching career, since everyone graduates from the same program but end up teaching different grades.

You know, I felt pretty confident and comfortable in the curriculum. And I think it is hard for a teacher education program, because you can't really predict where they are gonna be. You just can't teach completely, exactly what they are going to be teaching. I felt like they did good kind of giving us these scenarios. Like if you are teaching 4<sup>th</sup> grade, or if you are planning lessons for 4<sup>th</sup> grade or something. And then you ended

up teaching kindergarten. I think that a lot of the skills that we have to practice go up or down anyway. So I think that in that way the program did a good job, preparing you for writing lessons and things like that.

I think I mentioned that last time that the biggest thing that they were lacking was classroom management courses. Because I know. I took one. But I'd say it was more about the organization. It was helpful what they taught about organizing, but that is something that you could really observe when you were interning, and student teaching. Also, that was the biggest thing that I just struggled with, because it is hard, I mean it is really hard to figure out the first year. That was just the biggest thing that I think that my district, my school, and the program were really lacking. And I know you could never fully prepare somebody for classroom management but just the stronger focus would be helpful. Because I think no matter who the 1<sup>st</sup> year teacher is, that is going to be one of the hardest parts of the year, figuring that out. So it was definitely classroom management. (Libby)

Sofia was, overall, not happy with the program and how it prepared her. Her dissatisfaction toward the program was not about how it was shaped, but rather about the content of many courses and instructors' way of presenting the course content.

I'd say they were a few teachers that really made a huge impact on me. That is why I didn't get my masters here. Because I was like 'No thank you, I don't wanna go through'. It felt more political to me. It felt more as if they didn't care what the students really thought. Because I could assure you that almost every single one of the people that was with me, I was like 'What is the point of this?' in almost every class. I mean those teachers that I talked about, we loved going into that class, we didn't miss those classes.

I am like if I am paying for this. I am getting a good grade. I am doing everything I am doing. Tell me why you can tell, you can say 'Hey by the way even you earned everything,



you are getting B now.' I mean it just seems ridiculous to me. And of course those are the classes you don't wanna go to. You don't miss the classes with the good teachers. You go to class and get up and you can't wait what they are gonna show you. The other ones, you are like 'why am I here? Please make it end. 3 more hours. Ok here we go.' You know just sitting there and listening what they are saying. So to me it was just I don't felt that they actually truly listened to the students. (Sofia)

### **Have You Ever Thought About Giving Up Teaching?**

Teacher attrition in beginning years of teaching is quite high in the United States. Roughly 33% of teachers quit the profession in their first three years. Under this information, I asked participants if they ever wanted to quit the job. In general, numerous times they all had very hard times and days, and some thought about quitting many times, but their love for children and teaching children prevented them from doing that.

Despite all difficulties with school administration, parents and classroom management problems, Sofia wants to stay in teaching. As she much as she wants to stay in teaching, she points out the reality about teaching; Teaching is very complex. It is not just about having knowledge and skills to teach. There are also other factors such as parents, administration.

NO. I love being with kids. And I do understand, I mean if you ask. I have had so many people telling me that they stopped teaching. Like the program I am in right now, the pre-K program, and the lady came in and talked and she was 'I taught kindergarten for 3 years.' I was like 'Why did you quit?' she was

like 'Parents. Parents are horrible, horrible. I couldn't handle parents.' And I was just like 'Hmm. OK.' But I heard a lot of people say that, in general. Because they think that they just it is an easy job, you just get to play with kids. But those kids belong to somebody, and you got to please them, too. But, no there is nothing else I wanna do. I just learn more, so I can, will not experience those things again, at least to that degree. (Sofia)

Kayla has faith in herself as a teacher. She believes that if a teacher quit the job, it is partially that teachers' accountability. From her point of view, teachers can avoid many problems that cause them to quit. Even though she had challenges, she never wanted to quit.

NO. Never wanted to quit. When I first started teaching, I pep-talked myself that, it was thing that I said 'I will never, ever, ever, ever let this job make me cry or get to me. And if I feel like I am at the point where I want to quit, then I need to quit.' Because, you know a lot of bad teaching experiences are because .. I am not putting everything on a teacher, but the teacher makes it a bad experience, not all the time. Because there are those crazy people, parents, and those difficult kids or trash talking teacher or bad principal.

A lot of the times like it is up to you, how you take it, how you teach, how you manage your class, how you communicate with parents, how you communicate with other people. You have to eliminate a lot of, those outside stresses that make you wanna quit. I have thought about it. If anything while I was teaching, I realizes more is that this what I wanted to do. And not only I wanna do, but I wanna get better at to find tunes on those things I am not well at .. And I constantly reflect on my teaching and see if I can get better at, and ask for advice, and go to workshops and contained to get classes, because if I am gonna do something I am gonna try my best out of it possibly I can. I don't mean perfection but .... I never ever, ever thought about quitting. (Kayla)

Even though Libby has never thought about quitting, like all the participants, she faced many difficulties that often made her day tough. Libby learned how to deal with those days by inculcating to herself the belief that she is going to feel better in the morning.

I didn't really, I never really felt like completely overwhelmed, like 'I can't do that. I am not going to be able to finish.' I never felt like that. I never felt like quitting. And I still have never, ever felt like I needed to, or I wanted to really need to quit. I have never felt like that. I mean there have been days that 'Oh, I can't wait to go home', or like some days even if I had a lot of stuff to prepare for the next day, like I just said that 'I need a break'. 'I have to go home and regroup.' If I needed, I'd just take home things home and watch TV, cut or you know do things. And then I'd just try to get early next day. I'd just try to make sure that I wasn't overwhelming myself, and I was giving myself breaks if I needed them. I never really felt like quitting. There were definitely times that is was really hard.

There were a lot of tears. I mean still once in a while there might be tears. But it is just been, you know, I just try to, I guess I just know that in any job, there is gonna be good times and bad times. So I just try to be as best I can to deal with things that happen that were more difficult than .. Just know that will get better. But I never really felt like hopeless or anything like that. I mean everyday especially if something with student, if students kind of have a crazy day, you know if I wasn't prepared, a lesson didn't go as well as I wanted.. I just knew 'OK. I just have to make it through today, tomorrow will be completely different.' I mean is always is. Even the kids that have trouble one day, usually they come back and they are totally fine. Like it is nothing like that stretches, other than really difficult, challenging students. A lot of times the problem goes away overnight, and it is a fresh start in the morning.  
(Libby)

Not having a good mentorship in her first year and good support system from other teachers, Olive was tempted to quit many times in

both years. Classroom management was one of the biggest challenges for Olive's first and second year of teaching and the main reason that she considered quitting. Having 30 kindergarteners in her classroom without an assistant, she was challenged by a few students with behavioral and emotional problems. These students made her question herself as a teacher, although she never gave up on those children. Persistent to stay in the profession, she is still learning classroom management techniques as she moves toward her third year of teaching.

I think I kind of had a good first year overall. It was hard, horrible and I wanted to quit a lot, but I think you just kind of learning and you are expected to be able to do it right away because you have been doing/learning about for so long you are expected to walk in and to be a teacher. But there are so much more on the job training than that.

So that kind of stuff, classroom management stuff, is the hardest part. The other stuff you can figure out. Google lesson plans. But managing those kinds of kids who don't respond, it is like 10% of student population doesn't respond to traditional discipline, they are the hardest kids. Because, you don't know what to do with them. Them made me wanna quit. Because, you feel like a failure. Because, he has a tantrum every single day, and it is about every day. So obviously, I am not doing whatever I need to help him. Because, if I was it wouldn't happen every day. He was absent today, it was glorious....

At the beginning of the year, I had 30 kindergarteners, by myself, which made me wanna quit very bad. Because, they make you think in the program that you may have an aide, and you don't. And, but at the end of the year I ended up with being about 25-26. This year the same thing. But, 30 kindergarteners but I have ELL class. 90% didn't speak any English, and haven't

been school before. That was insane. And I ended up with 5 kids speaking English and the rest didn't know anything.  
(Olive)

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions**

#### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Beginning teachers' experiences have been studied by many researchers (Andrzejewski, 2008; D'Aniello, 2008; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Gavish & Friedman, 2010; Lambson, 2010; Latimer, 2009; NCCTQ, 2007; Simmons et al., 1999; Strong & Baron, 2004; . These studies provide much needed information that allows administrators and faculty to improve teacher education programs so that they, in turn, can prepare teacher candidates better. Nevertheless, as this study has shown, beginning teachers still struggle in their first years of teaching, and a great number of beginning teachers quit the profession.

Participants of this study willingly shared their feelings, thoughts, fears, challenges, and the ways they dealt with all of the difficulties they faced. As a result of their input in this study, I provide some recommendations. Although I do not intent to offer my recommendations to any specific individual, program, or university, I hope that these recommendations will, in general, inspire educational professionals to improve early childhood teacher education programs, to provide great undergraduate experiences to students in the

program, and to provide prospective teachers with the skills and knowledge to have a stronger and more successful first year.

Consistent with the research questions, I put my recommendations under the following categories:

- Program course work;
- Internships;
- Student teaching;
- Reality shock;
- Mentorship and university support;
- Prior experience of schooling; and
- Support in beginning years of teaching.

In his study conducted 21 years ago, Bullough (1989, pp. 152–153) made the following suggestions to first year teachers based on his analysis of a case study involving a beginning teacher.

- Decide to teach a second year even before starting the first year.
- Find a mentor who is experienced and willing to help you.
- Get familiar with school policies and regulations, especially discipline and management related school policies.
- Plan carefully and get organized.
- Do not try hard to be friends with your students; however, do get to know them.

- Develop good relations with other teachers and get involved.
- Take care of yourself and avoid stress.
- Develop good relations with staff other than teachers, especially the secretary and maintenance people.
- Remember that you are the authority, and you are in charge of your classroom.
- Forgive yourself for your mistakes and move on.
- Embrace good days, not bad days.

Since that time these suggestions have helped many teachers survive in their first year and to stay in the profession. I believe that his suggestions are still valid for current beginning teachers and they were re-stated (in different words) by the teachers in this student throughout their interviews.

**Course related issues.** A disconnection between classes taken in the program and real-life experiences was often brought up in my conversations with participants. As exemplified in chapter four and five, participants underlined their dissatisfaction toward courses in the program, and the need for additional courses. One of their concerns was that the course content of the ECD classes was repetitious. Confirming the outcome of Mueller, Wisneski, and File's (2010) study conducted at one of the university of Wisconsin's ECD



programs, this study's participants felt that, even though the course titles were different, several courses they had taken presented the same information over and over again. Early childhood development courses should be designed in a way that prevents this repetition. For example, courses could be designated either as theory or practice based, and it should be assured that instructors are not offering similar content or the same textbook. Another option could be a course matrix which demonstrates how knowledge builds to application from course to course.

One class that all of the participants were dissatisfied with was the special education course. They reported that this course only provided them with theoretical information such as the definition of specific disabilities but not how to identify children or work with children who had disabilities. As they later started teaching, they did not even know if some behaviors demonstrated by students were typical or what kind of behaviors should alert them. Therefore, whenever they had concerns regarding children's behavior or learning abilities, they either got advice from other teachers, or more commonly the internet. As a result, these beginning teachers did not know how to handle children with special needs and spent a great deal of their time in the classroom and after school addressing related problems or

tasks. I recommend that one of their internships be integrated with a special education classroom that is providing both theoretical and practical knowledge simultaneously.

Additionally, they felt negative towards some course instructors who did not make the connection between course content and real-life experiences.

One participant presented her view in this way:

We learned all that 'Vygotsky would say, scaffolding, or whatever. I don't remember any of that stuff. But it wasn't really like 'What is that mean in the classroom, what is scaffolding mean in the classroom, in a preschool classroom, more application.'

Another participant shared a similar criticism:

It was literally 'here is the book, here is what a 6-month old looks like. They will be crawling, they might be.' You know that kind of stuff, instead of 'How would you – if you had 1-year old classroom – what kind of project would you do to help them to increase their fine-motor skills, increase their gross-motor skills?' It wasn't like that. That would be a good ECD class.

Even though they were critical of some instructors, they also talked highly about some teachers who did offer them information about real-life experiences and sample activities that they could use when they started teaching. Moreover, they indicated that they benefited more from instructors who had teaching experiences in schools, since they were able to make the connection between theory and practice. These instructors could also share their experiences as practicing teachers,

which gave teacher candidates a more realistic view of what might happen when they start teaching.

Furthermore, they were really pleased with the course portfolios they created during some courses taken in the program, which they referred to as art and math courses. They mentioned often that they were still using some activities from portfolios formed in these courses.

One participant stated that she still use these portfolios:

A couple of my classes were perfect. I've learned a lot. I literally have the portfolios for these classes. I go back and like today that activity that I remembered for my math class. I pulled that out for my students. And I still reference that a lot. My math teacher—I am sure that she still works there— she made us to make these folders for activities, lesson plans, and stuff. She made everybody write lesson plans and present them all those lesson plans. All the different which is kind of, it is like different grades, different subjects, or different strengths like geometry, all these different things with math. So, I having that, it was so neat and like perfect. And I can just open it up and find something. My art notebook too, I open it up and look for stuff.

As a useful tool for these teachers, it might be suggested that portfolios, including ideas, resources and ready-to use activities be offered for all suitable courses.

Another point underlined by participants was the need for more courses in language and literacy, education of second language students, special education, psychology, and management. They felt a need for additional courses in those areas when they started to teach

their own classroom and felt a deficiency regarding knowledge and tools to teach effectively.

Classroom management is usually the most common struggle among beginning teachers. (Kagan, 1992; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001) To varying degrees, participants of this study addressed management issues in their practices. One interesting issue that was agreed upon by participants was the lack of support from school administration regarding classroom management of kindergarten and preschool classrooms and regarding the behavioral problems that often arise in the classroom. They also felt a lack of seriousness and school policy regarding discipline of young children; except Kayla, who only taught third grade, all other participants agreed on this issue.

Even though these participants took management course(s) in the program, they mostly learned classroom management skills from their mentor teachers during their student teaching and first-year teaching assignments. However if there was a mismatch between mentor and student teacher regarding management, the new teacher was left to figure out classroom management and discipline techniques in their first year of teaching as they went along. Olive, Belle and Sofia reported in accordance with this statement.

All five wished that they had taken more management classes combined with in-classroom practices while in the program. In light of these results, I agree with the recommendation offered by Silvestri (2001) based on his study of preservice teachers classroom management beliefs. Silvestri suggests that an early exposure of classroom management knowledge “along with observation of successful teachers who demonstrate effective classroom techniques” (p.579) would greatly increase first-year, teacher efficacy.

**Internships.** Commonly, participants of this study did not feel a great benefit from internships before they started their student teaching. As discussed in Chapter 5, internships did not serve their purpose for a variety of reasons. These include the view of the placement teacher toward interns, time limitations, and lack of connections to the courses taken. If it is arranged well, it is possible that internships have a huge impact on students’ learning, and students’ experience in the program and can influence their beginning career. There I would suggest, consistent with participants’ statements, that internship should be integrated within a course taken at the time. Therefore, students will have an opportunity to integrate learning activity into academic or theoretical content (Gallego, 2001; Shepel, 1995). For example, classroom management or special

education courses could be two of those courses. Second, interns can be seriously encouraged to use this opportunity to find a mentor for their student teaching. If the internship is integrated with management class, this also can be an opportunity for students to find a mentor whose classroom management and discipline philosophy will match theirs. Therefore, since they will already be equipped with classroom management and discipline skills learned from their student teaching, instead of trying to develop this skill in their first year. Thus, internships should be designed in way that will be more effective for students in the program.

**Student teaching.** Many researchers emphasize the role and experience of student teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Green, Hamilton, Kampton, & Ridgeway, 2005; Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin, 1999; Zeichner & Conclin, 2008). One aspect of student teaching is that it gives student teachers an opportunity to gain direct experience through social involvement and to make learning more effective (Wegner, 1998).

Schulz (2005) points out that student teaching enables prospective teachers “to understand the full scope of a teacher’s role” (p.160). I agree with this statement with caution. Participants of this study maintained that they were not aware of some aspects of

teachers' roles when they started teaching, even though these teachers completed their internships and student teaching assignments successfully in the program. One participant maintained that the program did not give a realistic view of teaching after graduation, and she expressed her view as:

I imagine an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg is where you can actually see, is like your lesson planning, and teaching. Teaching, because teaching is teaching, you are making kids learn things. And then the iceberg the below water is 12 times bigger than that. And all the other crap of teaching, from newsletters. I think you have to be prepared for the fact that it is time consuming and hard, and you have to really check yourself to see if this is really that you wanna do. This is kind of like sink or swim thing, this is truth of the teaching. Teaching is hard, it is hard finding a job, you need to set yourself out, set yourself out and figure out if you are really gonna do this or not.

Another participant also put the reality of her first year of teaching as:

It was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. Like I said before, you can have the best preparation in the world, but until you are there and doing it, you don't know what to do. And so, I think I kind of had a good first year overall. It was hard, horrible, and I wanted to quit a lot, but I think you just kind of learn that you are expected to be able to do it right away. You have been doing/learning about teaching for so long at that point that you are expected to walk in and to be a teacher. But there is so much more on the job training than that.

For student teachers who began the student teaching apprenticeship mid-year, the experience did not closely mirror that of real life. This is because the student teacher steps into a classroom that is already functioning well. For example, the physical environment has been set up and all the rules and curriculum are in place. This has both

positive and negative outcomes for student teachers. First of all, this environment is sheltered and they are allowed to make mistakes during this learning opportunity. They learn from their mistakes with constructive feedback from their mentor teacher. Secondly, in this safe, meaning-making environment they find a chance to develop a professional identity, which might be hard otherwise (Shepel, 1995). As they become comfortable in the teaching environment, they gain self-efficacy (Hong, 2010) and form their identities. Research shows that students who have had negative student teaching experiences or no student teaching experience at all are less likely to enter the profession or stay in the profession after the first year (Hong, 2010; Oh, Ankers, Llamas, & Tomyoy, 2005; Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010).

Pointing out the negative outcomes of student teaching in a sheltered environment is also important. For example, some mentor teachers might expect student teachers to mimic their teaching style. In this situation, student teachers would have “little room to develop their own practice and would have to fit into a fairly tight mold structured by their cooperating teachers” (Valencia, et al. 2009, p.310). On the contrary, some mentors believe that student teachers learn through trial and error and momentarily leave while student teachers take over the classroom (Valencia et al. 2009). The downside of this



idea is that student teachers do not get constructive feedback to improve their teaching practices, they might feel emotional isolation, and they might struggle with classroom discipline. (Bullough et al., 2002). Schulz (2005) suggests that programs should “ensure that teacher candidates are placed with collaborating teachers who question and study their own practice, and invite teacher candidates to do the same (p.164). Perspectives on this topic varied among the participants in this study. One of them struggled with emotional isolation and issues related to classroom discipline. One had great support and constructivist feedback. Another stated she had very similar classroom practices to her mentor. Thus, results confirm the importance of a balanced relationship between student teacher –mentor relationships to be able to construct high self-efficacy.

Completing student teaching assignments only in spring or fall was also commonly discussed by participants. Having experienced only one semester of student teaching, participants felt a lack of experience and knowledge. Again, which semester the student teaching occurred in also made a difference. Candidates who did their student teaching in spring expressed a more dramatic negative start in their first year of teaching. They felt there was a definite disadvantage of starting their student teaching after the academic year started. This

is because student teachers do not see the beginning process of classroom set-up such as the physical arrangement of the room and establishing procedures and instilling the rules to a new cohort of children. Consequently, the teachers who apprenticed in the spring semester tended to struggle more in their first year of teaching than the student teachers who completed this experience in the fall (Burke, 2004).

Some participants implied that while a positive student teaching experience eased the transition from college to the teaching profession, a negative student teaching experience might keep graduates from entering the profession. Finding similar outcomes, Green et al. (2005) outlined the importance of positive student teaching on retention, and negative student teaching experience on leaving the profession (Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010). As student teaching has such a huge impact on beginning teachers' decision before they enter teaching career, participants highlighted that some aspects of student teaching could be improved.

Another suggestion pertains to student teaching in a preschool setting. Some of the participants expressed a change of view toward preschool placement. They originally saw preschool teaching as "babysitting." Education of very young children and pre-schooled aged

children are commonly marginalized and teachers for young children are seen as babysitters (Ciyer, Nagasawa, Swadener, & Patet, 2010). Similar to Capuzzo's (2007) findings, preschool student teaching caused a shift in student teachers' views from "babysitting" to "complex and important for later schooling". One participant put it as:

It was awesome. I loved it. I was actually super mad, when I learned we were gonna do preschool. I was like 'I don't wanna waste my time on preschool, because it is babysitting, I don't wanna do it'. I was like really irritated. And after, I was like 'It was amazing, I was so happy'. So it was, I loved it. I think it taught me a lot. And I think even if you don't like end up teaching in preschool, knowing where kids come from that, it helps you. You like, 'Oh, they should have learned, like fine motor skills, they should have learned it in the preschool'. If they didn't, that is because they didn't learn in preschool. So, sometimes you use that kind of stuff, in your classroom for the kids that don't have that.

Although their viewpoint changed toward preschool teaching, most of them were not willing to teach below kindergarten. It is intriguing to say that among five participants, only one teacher taught in preschool at the time of interviews. In light of these findings it can be concluded that a required preschool student teaching is an effective way to change the perception regarding education of young children under the age of five. Furthermore, it is also desirable that student teachers should also have a quality experience in a setting for very young children. Finally, I have to emphasize that student teachers should be placed in a preschool that will allow this change of view. As one might

predict not all preschool settings offer quality education and care, and an experience in such places will only validate their view instead of a change.

**Length of student teaching.** Individuals who participated in the study stated the length and timing for their student teaching affected their practice as a first year teacher, which was also claimed by Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005) and also Mogharreban, MyIntyre, and Raisor (2010).

Participants who started their student teaching earlier than they were required—for example, starting in July instead of August—stated that attending school meetings with their mentors before the semester started was a big help in their understanding of the beginning-the-year process. They also helped their mentor teacher set up the classroom before students arrived. Seeing the whole process from the beginning, they had less difficulty with their classroom set-up. For example, Kayla started her student teaching experience during the fall semester and started prior to the beginning of the year with her mentor teacher. She assisted her mentor teacher in setting up the classroom. She attended all the meetings with him. She met him regularly to plan. She also received feedback from him on a regular basis. Additionally, because she agreed with his classroom

management philosophy and techniques, she acquired a great deal of these tools from him. Thus, among all participants, Kayla, who stated the importance of being prepared for the classroom well ahead of the time, reported fewer problems in her beginning years, and she had a much better first year of teaching than other participants.

In light of these findings, I propose that students should be taught about the importance of attending meetings, if possible, with their mentor teacher. They should be encouraged to ask their mentor teacher to see the process before the semesters starts for children. They should be given information regarding the challenges that they might encounter. These include parents' over involvement or under involvement, dynamics in the school, and relationships with colleagues.

**Reality shock.** The results of this study are consistent with Chen & Geis (2000) and Ben-Peretz & Rumney (1991) findings which state that when teachers enter the profession, most held an optimistic professional identity. Even with a positive attitude, the limited teaching experience caused a reality shock in their first year. The participants of this study definitely had what Vartuli and Rohs (2009) describe as “reality, cultural, or praxis shock [which] occurs when new teachers face daily problems which they have not been prepared to

solve” (p. 323). All participants expressed—to varying degrees—this very situation.

Analysis of data revealed beginning teachers do not believe that the program can prepare students fully for all teaching responsibilities of a teacher. Nevertheless, they expressed lack of efficiency regarding some areas and believed that the program could have prepared them better in those areas. Similarly, Wanzare (2007) suggests that pre-service training institutions are not adequately preparing teacher candidates—including field experiences—for the realities of teaching job. Beginning teachers enter the profession without knowing that there are many factors other than teaching children. Some of these factors expressed by participants of this study included:

- Getting prepared is time consuming; beginning teachers spend nights and weekends to get prepared. Fantili and McDougall’s (2009) also called attention on this issue.
- Negative relationships with parents and administration, which is very frustrating for new teacher who do not how to deal with these kinds of situations. Having conducted a study about the dynamics of parent-teacher interaction, Lasky (2000), suggests that preservice preparation programs and school administration should provide preservice and in-service teachers with required

skills, resources, and support to build a balanced relationships with diverse parent population. This suggestion could be considered carefully and thoroughly by teacher preparation programs.

- Managing 25–30 students without any teaching assistants is harder than assumed. Recchia, Beck, Esposito, and Tarrant's (2009) study reveals similar outcomes. Do not assume that you are going to get a teaching assistant or aide. In most cases, you will not.
- Having children with diverse needs such as English language learners, special education students, and students with behavioral and emotional problems is very challenging. It is hard to meet to the needs of all children with diverse needs. (Rechhia et al. 209)
- Beginning teachers, most of the time, do not know how to deal with unexpected situations. If they do not get strong support from administration and their assigned mentor, or at least from other colleagues, they are left alone with all those challenges: Sink or swim.
- They lack skills for classroom discipline and management. The number of classes offered for classroom management is

insufficient or do not provide effective tools to learn those skills.

Students paired up with mentors with good management skills learned those skills very well.

All of these factors are a part of the cultural education system that these graduates entered. Shepel (1995) maintain that that “the teacher’s professional development and self-determination are only possible by means of a process of mastering a cultural education system” (p. 439). In that case, students who are exposed to more knowledge and the process of cultural education system in the program will more likely develop professional identity. Therefore, they will have more desire and determination to enter and stay in teaching profession.

Additionally, in response to my question regarding the process that takes place after graduation, before their employment as teachers, the participants stated that right after graduation they were unaware of the specifics of what they should be doing. They held limited knowledge about specifics of Arizona Educator Proficiency Assessments (AEPA), certification requirements, job searching, and job interviewing process and techniques for a successful interview. One participant summarized her experience regarding this issue as:

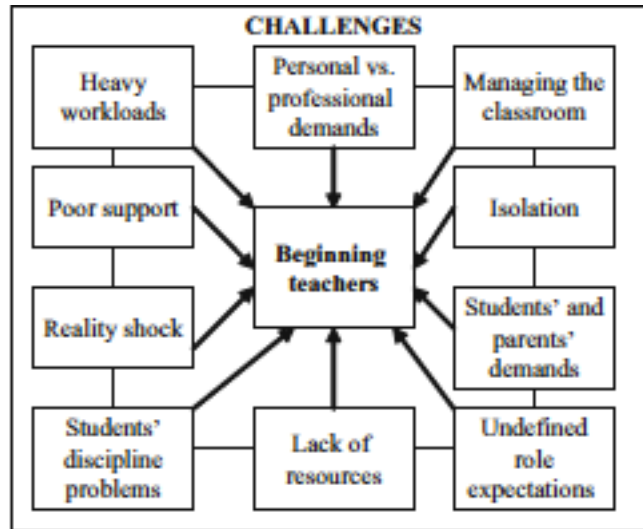
The test, all I did was go to the workshop. That was it. It was offered if you wanted, you’d signed up for it. And it is not like



they are telling you what to expect, what the test is like, but not giving any studying materials for the tests. Interviews, no. I don't think they really prepared me like how to interview, or how to job search. I don't think so. I don't even remember anything. I don't remember doing any mock interviews. Because, the interview process is kind of long, and ask you kind of lengthy questions. Well if they wanna continue interview, they do, you know. But no, I don't remember any of that happening. And for certification, no. I had no idea even what did you do to get certified before I graduated.

How well the graduates of a higher teacher education institution are doing is considered an indicator of that institution's quality measurement (Okpala, Rotich-Tanui, & Ardley, 2009). Therefore, it would benefit the institution as well as the prospective teachers to have access to career mentoring services or classes during their program.

Therefore, institutions that prepare teacher candidates are not only responsible to equip students with required knowledge to teach children, but also equip them with skills and knowledge to obtain a job and make sure that they aware of realities of their chosen career. Like many beginning teachers, participants of this study stated that they were not aware of some aspects of being a teacher, which were briefly discussed above. Consistent with findings of this study, Wanzare (2007) put the challenges faced by beginning teachers under the categories shown in Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Challenges faced by beginning teachers. Adapted from “The transition process: The early years of being a teacher,” by Wanzare, Z.O., 2007, in T. Townsend, & R. Bates (Eds.), *Handbook of teacher education* (pp. 343-364). Netherlands: Springer

These challenges caused a lack of self-efficacy in these beginning teachers who either thought about quitting or had really rough days to deal with. If beginning teachers are conscious of realities awaiting them in their beginning years, their experience of reality shock can happen at a much smaller magnitude. Consequently, the retention rate of teachers in their beginning years can be raised.

**Mentorship during student teaching and university support.** Having an experienced and supportive mentor during student teaching is essential. Participants commonly talked about the knowledge and skills they gained with help from their mentor teachers. They learned classroom management skills and techniques

mostly from their mentor teacher. Additionally, mentor teachers' constructive criticism helps the formation of student teachers' professional identity. Their experiences with their mentors and what they learned from their student mentor teachers can be related to how they experienced their first year of teaching. Positive experiences with their student teaching-mentor resulted in high self-efficacy (Bullough et al., 2002; Fives, Hamman, and Olivarez, 2007). Therefore, they felt more prepared for their first year and dealt with challenges better.

Under analysis of the findings, I suggest that students should be paired with experienced teachers who are willing to spend extra time and effort to provide student teachers with positive criticism. Koerner (1992) brought out an important point that needs to be kept in mind. Not all experienced teachers with effective teaching skill for young children will be good mentors for student teachers. The student teaching coordinators can confer with student students who just completed their student teaching and obtain details of their student teaching experience and their relationships with their mentors. Based on these formal and informal conversations—in a professional manner—mentor teacher's teaching practices and certain characteristics can be determined. Consequently, for the following semester, certain mentors can be suggested to certain student teacher candidates.

Most participants of this study found their K–3 student teacher placement and mentor by themselves according to their personality, the mentor teacher’s personality, the grade they wanted to teach, and their interests. Therefore, student teachers can be encouraged to find their K–3 student teaching placement and mentor teacher a semester before their student teaching actually begins, if they are not willing to take a chance in those areas.

Furthermore, participants felt a lack of university support during their student teaching. Although teacher candidates had a supervisor from the university, they perceived the supervisor’s role as not effective, which complies with the results of Timostsuk and Ugaste’s (2010) study. Participants hold the belief that supervisor’s role was solely evaluation. In some cases, in this study, the supervisor did not have enough knowledge and experience in early childhood education, so some of the student teachers could not relate to their supervisors in any way. Consistent with Capuozzo’s (2007) findings, analysis of the data suggest a reevaluation of roles and purposes of supervisors from ASU.

**Prior experience of schooling.** Participants’ schooling and childhood experiences have an effect on their practice as teachers. Kayla remembered her third grade teacher whom repeatedly told

students that she hated them. Kayla, teaching this same grade for last two years, always reminded herself not to be like her third grade teacher. Sofia who disapproved of her mother's teaching practice also expressed her refusal to be like her. Contrary to these examples, Belle adored her second grade teacher whom inspired her to go into education. Remembering her teacher as fun, she herself is trying to be a good role model for her students. Libby's mom had a positive impact on her practice. As she remembered her teachers' teaching practice as mostly instructional and ordinary, her mom was the one who made learning fun for her.

These results affirm Marshall's (2009) claim that teachers' choice of grade and how they care for children are influenced by teachers in their earlier schooling. Even though I did not have an opportunity to observe these participants teaching practices, from their statements and examples, I perceive that their childhood schooling experiences affected their practice, their choice of age group they teach, and what kind of teacher they wanted to be.

**Support in beginning years.** The biggest support that beginning teachers can get is mentors. Mentors are usually assigned by the school administration "based on convenience, volunteerism, and entitlement" (Stanulis & Floden, 2009, p. 114). This is how the

participants of this study were placed. Some participants' stated that due to various reasons, they had little or not enough support from their mentors in their first year.

Seeking advice from their mentor teachers regarding classroom practices and problems, classroom management techniques, challenges regarding specific students, regulations, and school dynamics and routines were commonly discussed in the interviews. Additionally, some wished for opportunities to be observed by their mentor teachers and given some constructive feedback, especially in challenging areas the first year. Parallel to statements of participants from this study, Stanulis and Floden (2009) addressed beginning teachers' desire to observe their mentor teachers on several occasions while they were teaching.

As much as participants of this study needed and received emotional support from their family members and non-teacher friends, the support they received from teacher-friends, teacher-roommates, and colleagues was more accommodating emotionally and professionally, which is consistent with Latimer's results (2009). It is clear that they were in need of a person or persons who share the same concerns, who were going through or who went through the same process as themselves. Suitably, these individuals understood

participants' state of emotions very well. They affirmed that it is a phase that all beginning teachers go through, and they told participants that they were not the only ones with these concerns and challenges. More importantly, supporters reminded them they were not alone. Thus, these participants were able to be pulled away from their loneliness (Wanzare, 2007) and isolation (Fantili & McDougall, 2009) that could have made them quit.

## **Conclusions**

The participants' experience in the beginning of their career were parallel to their views toward the degree the program prepared them for their career. It is shown that if one is having challenges in a specific area or areas, naturally they believe that the program was deficient in that area/s.

This study revealed that four out of five participants expressed an overall satisfaction regarding their preparation; although they believed that the program could have done a better job on the specific issues discussed earlier. Because some of the participants felt a need to address these gaps by going on to do post-baccalaureate study in those areas. One participant who was not satisfied overall with her undergraduate education at ASU, Tempe campus, articulated that her

dissatisfaction was the reason for not pursuing her masters' degree at ASU.

Analysis of the data suggests that a positive student teaching experience—like the experiences of some of these participants—made a difference in their decision to enter teaching. As also emphasized by Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow, (2002), positive student teaching experience resulted in this study's participants' development of strong self-efficacy related to teaching and preparedness which inspire them to enter teaching.

Although, they felt improvement of their skills in the program, they also stated that a program cannot fully prepare someone for her/his teaching career, since there are many other factors that might determine beginning years of experience. Some of the factors that emerged in this study include: 1) the type of school; 2) the mentor's availability; 3) the difference between the grade that is available to teach and the grade that is desired to teach; 4) grade changes every year; 5) student population; 6) lack of support from administration; 7) disagreement between school policy and teacher's philosophy; and 8) lack of discipline policy regarding young children.

Thus, it is not possible to prepare every individual for various difficulties they might encounter in their beginning years of teaching;



however it is the teacher education programs' responsibility to prepare them as best as possible to provide the knowledge and skill to survive in the beginning years and to prepare them for the realities of these years.

Participants of this study were in either second or third year of teaching. Therefore, they started their teaching career and managed to stay in teaching for two or three years. All of them reported a love for students and teaching, and an eagerness to stay in teaching. There is also a need to do studies with graduates who did not enter a teaching career or just quit teaching in their beginning years. It is also important to get an understanding of their views toward the program and of the student teaching experience.

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APPENDIX A  
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
APPROVAL

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

**To:** Billie Enz  
CENTER BLD

**From:** for Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*  
Soc Beh IRB *ME*

**Date:** 02/18/2010

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 02/18/2010

**IRB Protocol #:** 1002004804

**Study Title:** Programmatic Impact: Understanding the Impact of Dual Student Teaching on Beginning Early Child Experiences

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.



APPENDIX B

INFORMATION LETTER-INTERVIEWS

#### INFORMATION LETTER-INTERVIEWS

Programmatic Impact: Understanding the Impact of Dual Student Teaching  
on Beginning Early Childhood Teachers' Experiences.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Beth Swadener and Billie Enz in the Mary Lou Fulton Institute and Graduate School of Education at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation through which I will examine the impact of preservice teaching experiences on beginning teachers' practices in the profession. For this study, I will be interviewing six teachers who were graduated from Early Childhood Teacher Education, Mary Lou Fulton, COE, ASU.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve two 30-45 minutes individual interviews and one focus group discussion (approximately 90-120 minutes) involving all participants over the course of three months. Interviews and discussion will take place in a time and place that will be convenient for you. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Your participation is invaluable for me and my study. Your responses will be used as a primary data for my dissertation. I am hoping that the results of this study will be a good source and reference for teacher education programs at ASU or at any other institutions that train teachers. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. As a courtesy, you will be offered a \$33 gift card upon completing the prerequisites of participation in interviews and focus group discussion (a total of \$99 for two individual interviews and one focus group discussion).

Your responses will be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your actual name will not be used. You may choose a pseudonym or I will assign one for you. Moreover, I will not use any specific information and names that might divulge your identity.

I would like to audiotape and video-tape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. All records will be kept by the researcher in a safe place, and no one else will have access to them. Your responses will be only shared and discussed with my mentor. All recordings and transcripts will be kept for 7 years after data collection is completed in a digital storage device protected with a password that will be known only by the researcher.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at:

Name:	E-mail address:	Phone #:
Billie Enz	<a href="mailto:bjenz@asu.edu">bjenz@asu.edu</a>	480-727-6255
Beth Swadener	<a href="mailto:bswandener@asu.edu">bswandener@asu.edu</a>	480-965-1747
Meral Besken-Ergisi	<a href="mailto:Meral.beskenenergisi@asu.edu">Meral.beskenenergisi@asu.edu</a>	480-664-1400 and 480-381-9196

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Sincerely,  
Meral Besken Ergisi  
Graduate Student  
Mary Lou Fulton Institute and Graduate School of Education  
Arizona State University

---

I am interested in participating in your study. You may contact me at:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Signatures: \_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be part of the study

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be videotaped

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

**Session I**

*Interview Protocol*

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study and I appreciate your willingness to do so. The purpose of this inquiry is to elaborate on first-year early childhood teachers' school experiences in regard to their preparation in teacher education programs.

If possible, please refrain from **using names or any other information** that could be associated or identified with a particular student, teacher, colleague, or administrator. In the event this does happen, rest assured that this information will be excluded from your statement.

All comments made today, in future interviews, and focus group discussions are **confidential**. These interviews will be both video and audio-taped. The recordings will be used strictly for the purposes of this research study. Your statements will be transcribed and coded. Some statements may be quoted in this study. Your privacy and confidentiality will be maintained by using a pseudonym and any information might reveal your identity will be either changed or not used. Your willingness as a participant is very important. If you wish to stop to participate in the study, you may do that anytime during the individual and focus group interview. Please let me know if you have any questions.

**Directions:**

I will ask you a series of questions that are prepared prior to the interview, and some questions based on your responses. Interviews will be conducted in a conversation manner. I am not looking for specific answers. Please respond to each question as completely and accurately as possible. At times, I may ask you to elaborate on or explain further. If, for any reason, a question is uncomfortable, you may refuse to answer and we will move to the next question. Do you have any questions?

**Individual interview questions Session 1:**

**Personal Experiences**

- Would you please tell me about yourself?
  - Your name
  - Age
  - Family background / cultural background
    - Can you describe your own family's demographics?
    - Where did you grow up?
    - What was your schooling like?
    - Did you attend one school for many years or did you attend several schools?
    - How would you describe your family socio-economic status?
    - How would you describe your school's SES?

**Teacher preparation experience**

- Would you please tell me how you decided to become a ecd teacher?
- When were you certain you wanted to become a teacher?
- What had the biggest impact on your decision?
- Can you tell me about yourself as a student?
  - How would you describe yourself as a student?
  - Did you work while you were studying in the program?
- Can you talk about classes you have taken in the program?
  - Do you think classes were effective in preparing you to be a teacher?
  - What would you have changed about the program?.
- Discuss your feelings of teacher preparedness and efficacy?
- **Student teaching experience Pre- K**
  - Can you tell me about your PreK student teaching experience?
    - How do you feel about your experience in student teaching?
    - Were your experiences as a student teacher similar to those in your experiences as a beginning teacher?
    - If similar, how?
    - If different, how?
  - Can you tell me how effective your Pre-K student teaching was in preparing you as a teacher?
  - What would you have changed in your student teaching, if you could?
    - What was missing?

- What was over-emphasized?
- **Student teaching experience K-3**
  - Can you tell me about your K-3 student teaching experience?
    - How do you feel about your experience in student teaching?
    - Were your experiences as a student teacher similar to those in your experiences as a beginning teacher?
    - If similar, how?
    - If different, how?
  - Can you tell me how effective your Pre-K student teaching was in preparing you as a teacher?
  - What would you have changed in your student teaching, if you could?
    - What was missing?
    - What was over-emphasized?

**Graduation and employment process**

- Would you please tell me about the process starting from your graduation until your employment in the school?
  - Did you find the process difficult? Please explain.
- Did you get any support from your program while seeking for a job or in employment process? Please explain.
- Was the program effective in preparing you for this process? Please explain.

**Think about your own schooling experiences – were they similar to your student teaching experience? To your current teaching assignment?**

**Individual interview questions # 2:**

**School environment/support**

- Do you get any support as a first year teacher, at your school or outside school?
- Do you get any support from school administration? If so, please explain.
- Do you have a mentor?
  - If so, will you please explain what type of support are you getting from your mentor?
  - How is your relationship?
  - If not, who do you contact when you need any advice/ when you are in a situation for help?

**Home support / personal life**

- Can you tell me about your personal life/ home life? Married/ single/ relationship/ children/ etc.
- Do you feel that you are getting the support you need as a beginning teacher in your personal life?
  - If yes, please explain.
  - If no, please explain.
- What have been the greatest challenges you have faced since becoming a teacher?
  - How did your program help you to deal with this situation?
- What knowledge do you wish you would have received in your program?
- What type of support do you wish the school district would provide?
- Is there any additional information that you would like to share at this time?



#### **Focus Group Questions**

Participant responses in previous interviews will be the impetus for culminating focus group discussion.

Specifically, we will:

- Share common responses
- Discuss difficulties that you have encountered as a beginning teacher?
- How have you feelings of efficacy and preparedness evolved since the semester started?
- Discuss what helped you the most.
- What information and preparation could have helped you feel more prepared in the beginning of your teaching career (with regards to both teacher prep and district support/in-service)?
- Is there any additional information that you would like to share at this time?